

THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE: A WOMANIST MODEL  
OF HEALING AND WHOLENESS IN THE LIFE  
OF MERGED CONGREGATIONS

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A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
DAYTON, OHIO  
December, 2012

**United Theological Seminary  
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page  
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

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## **ABSTRACT**

# **THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE: A WOMANIST MODEL OF HEALING AND WHOLENESS IN THE LIFE OF MERGED CONGREGATIONS**

by

Janie Dowdy-Dandridge

United Theological Seminary, 2012

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The context for this project is Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The problems in this context are the spirit of death, defeat and discouragement as a result of a congregational merger, relocation and the building of a new sanctuary. The hypothesis utilized a qualitative approach of pre and post-tests, surveys, and an ethnographic cultural study to determine the intervention's effectiveness. A qualitative methodology identified issues of unity in the church. Bible studies, sermon series, focus groups, and congregational wellness assessments focused on creating community. The sessions were successful with persons developing a heart for worship.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No work is an isolated endeavor. There are many persons who have helped to produce and develop this project. First and foremost, the writer gives God thanks for ultimately choosing me for this assignment. She is deeply indebted to everyone for your loving support. The Doctor of Ministry program culminates an extensive journey for the writer who was born to inspire others and empowers others to excel for greatness. Her gratitude goes to Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, mentor and sister beloved for reminding her to be strong and stay the course to finish the journey. Thank you Bishop McKenzie, for continually encouraging the writer with these words, “*You have what it takes*” Thank you Rev. Dr. Charlotte Blake Sydnor, D. Min., Rev. Dr. Kent Johnson, D. Min., Rev. Dr. Darryl Ingram, D. Min. and Rev. Dr. Sherman Tribble, Ph.D. for serving as my advisors and Professional Associates; you have kept the writer on task and given her insight and inspiration. She must acknowledge with much appreciation the members of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church, D.Min. Students, and her peer group associates, who supportively came to her aid and helped to birth the project as their own.

The writer thanks her mother for helping her to learn that life is a journey made up of pedagogics of life lessons that are meant to be shared, and to liberate and empower others. Her mother taught her to always do what she was passionate about. Her mother also taught her to redefine the impossible, dream big, pray big and things will happen if she only just believe. Thank you for helping her to learn how to celebrate life.

Special acknowledgment is given to the members of the writer's Doctor of Ministry focus group for your help and support. Special consideration and thanks are given to the group's mentors, Doctors Donnell Moore and Angela Washington for their wise counsel always reminding the writer to trust the process and Candace D. Allen Staten, the writer's peer associate for your sisterly encouragement and constant friendship through-out the program.

The writer thanks her beloved husband, Dr. John Daniel Dandridge who shared this 2 1/2 year journey with her showing steadfast love. And to the writer's family who has been a continuous source of strength and encouragement. Thank you for your love and encouragement. It was you who said to her, that one day the writer would complete this journey.

## **DEDICATION**

This project is dedicated to the writer's loving and supportive 90 year-old mother, Mrs. Ora Lee Beattie, a woman who knows how to make a way out of no way and in memory of her father; the late Reverend Willie Arthur Beattie, Sr., a true prophet of God. She also dedicates this project to her dearly beloved deceased sister, Carolyn Elaine Beattie.

• To her beloved partner in ministry and marriage, her beloved husband, John Daniel Dandridge, you are the love of the writer's life and her soul-mate.

To the members of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church who participated in the development of this project; the success of this project is due to your collective work together. You have profoundly impacted the writer's life allowing me to grow beyond what she ever imagined. Your collective struggles of trust, honesty, and communication have been a constant endeavor to find romance and meaning.

This project is also dedicated to the writer's children, Du'juan and Kristen Dowdy and her grandchildren, Deosha, Rollie, Dujuan, II and DuMikah. The writer thanks God for you as you celebrate life together.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the writer's quest to rediscover, revitalize and reclaim the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ at Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal, a merged congregation that appeared to be happily married after eighteen years, the writer, Rev. Janie Dowdy-Dandridge sought the wisdom and guidance of the previous pastor, Rev. Leland H. Webster. Additionally, the writer studied the two hundred and eighty-two year history of the churches as well as spoke with both congregations which comprises of Webb Chapel African Methodist Episcopal and Cedar Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church trying to make sense of why the merged congregation had fallen out of love and lost of her identity as a church.

The operative focus of this model in ministry developed out of the writer's passion to renew the love relationship that once existed prior to the relocation of building a new sanctuary and a congregational merger for Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) a merged congregation within the suburban rural area of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. This merger was the result of two declining congregations, Webb Chapel AME Church and Cedar Grove AME Church. This merger occurred in 1998 because the Department of Transportation purchased the property of Cedar Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church's land along Highway 231 South in Christiana Tennessee. After the merger the congregation's attention shifted from missions and

discipleship to maintenance and upkeep of their newly constructed church edifice. Each individual church lost their zeal to honor their commitment to worship together, work together, pray together, play together, serve together, commune together as a church and is in need of returning to their first love; loving God with all their heart, soul, mind and loving others. Somewhere along the way the congregation forgot their common mission, vision, values, and purpose. They lost their identity as a church. One of the vast challenges of this project was to get the congregation to return to the rightful mission of the church which is saving souls, making disciples and empowering lives.

With a clear understanding of what the mission of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) entails which is *to minister to the social, spiritual, and physical development of all people*, the ultimate purposes are: (1) make available God's biblical principles, (2) spread Christ's liberating gospel, and (3) provide continuing programs which will enhance the entire social development of all people. If the church reclaims the passion, purpose and mission of the church that once existed; the church of the Webb Grove AME Church can become a healing center for the broken, discouraged, and defeated.

The writer of this project, Reverend Janie Dowdy-Dandridge, will design a ministry model for church renewal and revitalization. It is expected that it will be a replicable, healthy and holistic prototype that will strengthen and reconcile this church and similar churches through building a covenant community.

The state of the art model in ministry will serve to engage and empower disciples of Jesus Christ to meet the needs of fragmented individuals within and beyond the institutional walls of brick and mortar. Although, many speak of the church in terms of

organizational language rather than placing emphasis on being a loving, caring, and living organism, the church is not the building. While it is true the church is a corporate body, it is crucial for the community of faith to function as a living breathing body since everything about the body is relational.

The Apostle Paul makes a pressing plea to the local church in Romans as he clearly articulates in Romans 12:4-5, “*For as in one body we have many members, and not all the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.*”<sup>1</sup> There is simply no way for the community of faith to live together as a church family without total dependence on Christ and each other. Paul goes on to remind the readers in Roman 12:9-21 that love should be unpretentious, sincere, and without airs; live in harmony with one another and if it is possible, so far as it depends try to live peaceably with everyone. If the Roman Christians could not live together in harmony then evangelism would die. Make no mistake about it; the heart of the gospel is connected to evangelism and discipleship.

Nothing is more important than covenant relationships built on love as a result of evangelism and following the teachings of Jesus through acts of compassion and love. Moreover, relationships are built as visions, values and missions are collectively shared together. Thus, evangelism is the mission of the church. Congregations from time to time have neglected to remain faithful to live a life that becomes the gospel practicing the vow to love, honor and cherish as in a marriage relationship. This ministry model project, *The Two Shall Become One: A Womanist Model of Healing and Wholeness in the Life of*

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<sup>1</sup>Rom 12:4-5 (NIV). All subsequent scripture references will come from the New International Version.

*Merged Congregations* strives for oneness with God the same way a man and woman enters into a covenant of marriage.

Holman Quick Source Dictionary defines church in the New Testament, the Greek word *ekklesia* as it refers to (1) any assembly, local bodies of believers, or (2) the universal body of all believers.<sup>2</sup> *The Church as the body of Christ*: is not merely a sectarian religious society.<sup>3</sup> Jesus speaks of personally building this new community on the confession of His lordship (Matthew 16:18-19).<sup>4</sup> The apostles recognized the birth of the church at Pentecost as the work of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup> The description of the church as the body of Christ designates Jesus' rule over the community.<sup>6</sup> As the exalted Son of David, He exercised sovereignty by His Spirit and His Word. The body of Christ does not only refer to the universal church, but applies to the local congregation of believers.

The fact that the church is the body of Christ necessarily entails that individual members belong to Christ.<sup>7</sup> As such, each church must be composed of a regenerated membership, those giving evidence of faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup> *The Church as Covenant*: The New Testament refers to the church as *the pillar and foundation of the truth* (1 Timothy 3:15 HCSB). From the beginning the church was to serve as a confessional body, holding to the truth of Christ revealed by the prophets and apostles chosen by Jesus

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<sup>2</sup>Holman Quick Source Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2005), 63.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 63.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Rodney Hunter, H. Newton Mallory, Liston O. Mills, John Patton, Nancy J. Ramsay, *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 202, 203.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

Christ (Eph 2:20). At the underlying core of the church's communal life is worship; a strategic heart to worship that is intentional and transformational is essential to the communal life of the church. However, at any rate, the writer consulted with the Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling by Rodney J. Hunter, General Editor, et al., to get a more in-depth meaning of church, community, fellowship and care.

With a heart to understand the communal life and mission of the congregation as the community of faith, the writer discovered etymologically, the term community refers to the obligations, gifts, or services that persons bring to one another; thus, what they have, they have partly in common.<sup>9</sup> A contrasting term is *immunity* meaning not under obligation, exempt. Bodies of faith should not experience themselves as immunities from, but as resources for persons.<sup>10</sup>

Community is similar to covenant, which suggest an overcoming of barriers between strangers and an identifying of ways in which they can be resources for each other (*to love one another*).<sup>11</sup> Hunter, et al., goes on to define *fellowship* which means a laying together of money or property, hence a partnership or a society, a mutuality of care and a sharing of material of resources in support of care.<sup>12</sup> Thus community, fellowship, and care points to the functions inherent in all communal experiences which can be brought forward in explicit ways in the congregational life and work of religious communities.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

Chapter One of the document specifies the ministry focus, which includes the landscape of the researcher's spiritual journey and ministry context. The researcher also presents an overview of the ministry problem in this context: the spirit of death, defeat and discouragement as a result of a congregational merger and relocation. It will also provide details of how the writer's spiritual autobiography and the ministry context parallel each other in similar phases of each other's spiritual and historical journey.

In Chapter Two, the state of the art in ministry is considered. The researcher provides a review of the literature from a variety of perspective resources in the specialized area of church growth and recovering the mission of the church. In this chapter the reader examines and assesses an array of researchers and specialists in the field of providing innovative methods of transforming the church, community and individuals lives; experts in the faith community on implementing successful strategies on making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Three provides the theoretical foundation for this project. As such, the researcher explores biblical, historical and theological documentation in support of this ministry model. The biblical foundation provides the scriptural framework to support remembering the human experience that has been shaped by the Bible. The historical foundation provides the key to understanding the church in a covenant community, the history of merged congregations, and the power of the connectional Wesleyan church.

Chapter Four outlines the design of the research methodology used in this project. The chapter includes the hypothesis, the intervention, the research design, the questionnaires, oral history project, and the instrumentation of data collection from the

focus groups, sermon series, workshops and a ethnographic cultural study of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Chapter Five, the researcher discusses the results of the field experience and an analysis of the data collected.

The final chapter of this project, Chapter Six, gives the researcher's reflections, summary and conclusions. It is this researcher's hope that, as a result of this project, clergy and laity will have a renewed appreciation for and a resolve to implement comprehensive, biblically based holistic discipleship and evangelism programs in their churches. Successful interventions will result in transformational leadership for the entire congregation.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

There is convincing evidence that just going through the motions of religious life, going to church, doing church rather than being God's church is not enough to maintain a healthy and holistic connection with a loving God, self, and others. A common frequently used excuse for withdrawal from one's relationship with the church and God is *I am not spiritually growing*. Today, it is a common thing to hear a congregation or a church member say *we really had church today*, when each year millions of Christians are leaving the traditional church. In a similar way, it is important to note that many congregations have shifted their focus away from God's original intent for the church. At the same time, an important aspect of this project is rediscovering the missional ecclesiology of the local church.

There are four principal words that are essential to the research of this project; accountability, covenant, relationships and discipleship. These four words offer insight in building community in the various ministries at Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church. The writer draws insight from David Lowes Watson's extensive work in Christian Discipleship through mutual accountability as he revitalized the class leader system within the Wesleyan Tradition. Watson offers mutual accountability as a means of watching over one another in love. Mutual accountability provides an opportunity to form

covenant discipleship groups that strengthened relationships with each other in love. At the same time, Covenant Discipleship Groups develop faithful leaders who are accountable to one another. Watson modeled Wesley's General Rules of Discipleship that has ultimately given the writer of this project spiritual insight for developing a similar model of covenant discipleship ministry groups at Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal church. It is a model of a healthy Christ focused method of making disciples. David Lowes Watson in the book, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability Covenant Discipleship Groups* provides structure that helps people know what it means to follow Jesus and it empowers them to act accordingly.<sup>1</sup> Steven Manskar writes in his book on *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household*, the purpose of the General Rules of Discipleship was to provide guidance for the formation of Christian character among the members.<sup>2</sup> Manskar adds the General Rules were simple: (1) do no harm avoiding evil of every kind; (2) do good; (3) Attend all the ordinances of God such as worship, attend to the ministry of the word, the Lord's Supper, search the Scriptures, and engage in family and private prayer.<sup>3</sup> The church has been called to be a model of the Kingdom of God as it points to the person of Jesus Christ and works towards God's vision of living out mutual accountability in faithful obedience to God watching over one another in love.

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<sup>1</sup>David Lowes Watson, *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), ix.

<sup>2</sup>Steven W. Manskar, *Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources 2006, 2010), 25.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Consequently, covenant relationships, discipleship, evangelism, and social transformation are the work of the Holy Spirit. In the work of the kingdom and Christian community, these attributes take precedence over selfish personal agendas. Mike Slaughter and Charles E. Gutenson co-writers of *Hijacked: Responding To The Partisan Church Divide* say, “the effects of the attitudes documented by George Barna extends beyond a rejection of Christianity, to a rejection of formal religious affiliation in general.”<sup>4</sup> Slaughter and et al go to say, between 1900 and 2010, the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans—those reporting their religion as nothing in particular more than doubled by Millennial Generation Americans under the age of 30.<sup>5</sup>

One-third of Millennial’s report that they do not belong to any religious tradition making them more than three times more likely to have no formal religious affiliation than their grandparents (those aged 65 and older).<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the true meaning of membership, stewardship, and discipleship has become flawed. Above all, the forgotten power of preaching the gospel has also become a stage of entertainment for *Rock Star Clergy*. The sacred preaching moment has become an opportunity to perform on Sunday morning as preachers are delivering Internet sermons and cut and paste Bible study sessions. Americans today are more devoted to seeking spiritual enlightenment that ultimately leads to stagnant, declining or plateaued congregations.

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<sup>4</sup>Mike Slaughter and Charles E. Gutenson with Robert P. Jones, *Hijacked: responding to the Partisan Church Divide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

Unfortunately, these approaches no longer work to guide congregations to healthy and holistic church growth. It is sad but true, the world has turned their attention to celebrities, cars, clothes, jewelry, and those things have become their *gods*. However, when vital worship is culturally relevant, discipleship, evangelism, and stewardship are the foremost desires of the congregation. Transformational leadership can occur to restore community and foster healthy fellowship, which are two pivotal components for church renewal.

The writer believes the problem lies therein when the congregation has forsaken and abandoned the mission of the church. Investing in creating community through relationship building is a valuable process in making disciples. Although Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) was excited about the congregational merger, relocation and building of their new edifice, their new sanctuary was simply a place to worship God with people who were still dealing with unresolved pain. Two congregations came together in a church merger and relocation to solve the problem of having a common place to worship, have been in maintenance mode since 1993. When both congregations departed from their old places of worship, they did not leave their old habits, customs, or traditions behind. It was business as usual. It was an “us against them” mentality, and they lost their passion to be a mission driven church. What appeared to be a new paradigm for ministry was still an old model of ministry masked by control, domination, pain, and unresolved issues that festered in the church. As a result, the people were unable to grow and adapt to change. John B. Cobb, Jr., describes the condition by stating, our churches are sick and the problem is present in other

denominations as well.<sup>7</sup> He goes on to say, statistical projections indicate that this is a sickness unto death.<sup>8</sup>

After a close observation of studying Webb Grove AME church's culture, the writer discovered a strong spiritual decline in bearing witness to the saving grace of Jesus Christ through praise, worship, and intentional prayer. The Great Commandment (Mt 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20) are the responses to the hypothesis for this project's model. If the church reclaims the mission of making disciples a healthier and holistic church can materialize. The point is, the writer is perplexed and wants to know what has happened in the American church today when membership or belonging to a local fellowship means so little. This tough question is about challenging the way a community of faith thinks about their relation with God, self and others.

The writer recalls growing up in the church. For her, teaching, discipleship, ministry, fellowship, and evangelism took place for transformation. Souls were saved, lives were changed; people did not quench the moving of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of this project is to empower a merged congregation to renew her love for God and come together as a unified body while employing holistic discipleship and strategic evangelism programs. Typical for most congregations in transition is the recapturing of the congregation's identity, values, mission, and vision as a church and developing a heart for worship.

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<sup>7</sup>John Cobb, *Reclaiming The Church: Where The Mainline Church Went Wrong And What To Do About It* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

After researching the church's history, the writer was given several videotapes of the 1998 Dedication Service of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church marching into their new building as a merged congregation. The writer pieced together clues from the videotape that brokenness, distrust, loss of identity, and a lack of love permeated the church. Bishop Hamel Hartford Brookins, the 91<sup>st</sup> Consecrated and elected Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church preached their dedication sermon entitled, *You Have Built the Church, Now What?* In the sermon, Bishop Brookins challenged the people to not make the building or the pastor the object of their worship. And they did just that. Many factors both internal and external contributed to the loss of God as the subject and object of their worship. In addition to the aforementioned, mini wars among members led to division, schisms, fighting for control and power in the church.

The return of a disgruntled member with a transformed heart for God was a spiritual blessing in disguise. The parishioner posted a comment on Facebook asking to know the difference between religion and spirituality. In responding to the Facebook post, the writer realized the lack of spirituality throughout the church.

The enthusiasm to sustain the church's vitality was gone and consequently, the society at large had lost its spiritual center. The writer's true assessment of fellowship time at the church was coffee, cupcakes, fried potatoes, and bacon and eggs during Sunday morning breakfast. Afternoon fellowship time became sharing in the same common manner; eating fried chicken and breaking bread with family members they did not even like. The church has lost the meaning of what communion and table fellowship means and the true meaning of *kononia* fellowship.

The writer explored social and spiritual transformation through a loving and nurturing approach. It consisted of being in community with one another, and building up the body of Christ rather than focusing on building edifices with brick and mortar.

Women by nature are naturally builders, and caretakers, as well as nurturers. It has been said that man works from sun up to sun down, but a woman's work is never done. Women get the down and dirty jobs. As a matter of fact, the writer has been called the cleanup woman because she is frequently appointed to pastoral charges where she has to clean up behind her male colleagues who in many cases have disrupted the church.

Women are more powerful than ever, a force to be reckoned with in the field of evangelism and discipleship. There is strong evidence suggesting women named as leaders in Paul's letters engaged in activities that contributed directly to risking their lives for the sake of the gospel. If one is to study the role of women in the expansion of Christian missions, clearly women such as Priscilla, Phoebe Euodia and Syntyche and others had active roles in evangelism and discipleship making.

A successful resolution to the aforementioned problem statement shall result in transformational leadership for the entire congregation. Therefore, from a Womanist perspective, the writer has been called to reconcile women and men to claim their rightful status in God's church. A new voice of leadership has dawned for women as women learn to recognize and esteem their equality, the dignity of their own identity and their own divine purpose in God's redemptive plan of salvation.

In light of the formidable challenges and archaic religious dogmas and ecclesiastical restraints which are as outdated as a number 5 Tin wash tub and an archaic clothes lines, the silence has been broken and the glass ceiling has been shattered. Vashti

McKenzie in her book, *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry*, asserts that from the earliest colonial times in American, women were organizing, preaching, and/or exercising leadership in religious societies.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of the political and social restraints, the writer has navigated through deep waters of cultural oppression as someone living in a foreign land. Although the African Methodist Episcopal Church elected her first female bishop, Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, the struggle is not over for women who are qualified in head and heart, but still serve on the backside of desert places in mediocre pastoral appointments. However, the writer firmly believes that it is time to put an end to the infectious dis-ease of narcissism in the church. The writer grew up with the words of this familiar hymn written by Lucy E. Campbell a native of Memphis, Tennessee:

Something within that holdeth the reins,  
 Something within that banishes the pain,  
 Something within that I cannot explain,  
 All that I know there is something within.<sup>10</sup>

While it is true, the mission belongs to God (*Missio Dei*) it is the responsibility of every member of the congregation to be a true follower of God. Being a part-time lover is not good enough. We must love God on a full-time basis. The writer's life and ministry context which has been marked by twist, turns and detours to her own path to wholeness provided an awakening to her Womanist perspective on hope, salvation and

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<sup>9</sup>Vashti McMckenzie, *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry Revised and Updated* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 24.

<sup>10</sup>Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't For The Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 8.

transformation. The writer's context has prepared her for present usefulness in the Kingdom of God.

One of the critical points made by Floyd Flake at the January 2011 Doctoral Ministry Intensive was Flake's analysis of the congregation at Allen Cathedral AME Church in Jamaica, New York.<sup>11</sup> At the Tuesday morning plenary session, Flake's message was on *Transformation: National and Foreign Missions for the Master*. He began by asking, "How do you create mechanisms within to build models to meet the needs of the community that reach outwardly?"<sup>12</sup> First, missions begin at home.<sup>13</sup> He continued the discussion by stating the pastor does strategy planning by studying the psychology of the people. Initially after receiving his appointment he observed the people in the congregation in order to better understand them spiritually, emotionally, and socially, in Bible study, choir rehearsal, and other opportunities of worship. Floyd Flake shared his definition of empowerment.

As leaders we create the environment to empower the people because as leaders we cannot fix problems if we are emotionally messed up also." In addition to the aforementioned, Flake adds, "in growing a church for the Twenty-First Century, its' about church growth." He continued by stating nobody wants to go to a dead church. In order to build a Model of Ministry that is vital and sustainable, Dr. Flake suggested (1) Old Models just do not work; (2) I must train and develop the leadership; (3) build a

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<sup>11</sup>Floyd Flake, January 2011 Doctoral of Ministry Intensive, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

quality staff; (4) build a system; (5) set up a method of reporting; (6) prepare for funerals; (7) set up a management system no matter how small the church. Nothing happens by accident. The writer believes the systemic approach for church growth and transformation Dr. Flake used in his ministry is a timely model she can implement to treat the problem at Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Born in Memphis, Tennessee to the parents of Reverend Willie Arthur Beattie, Sr. and Ora Lee Jones Beattie, Janie Kay Beattie Dowdy-Dandridge grew up in a church going, Christian home with loving parents. The writer, the oldest girl of nine children began her spiritual journey as early as eight years old. She has possessed a strong faith in Jesus Christ. As the writer reflected on the memories of growing up as a child she remembers reminded how she spent lots of time with the family in small store front Baptist churches where her strict and controlling father served as the pastor of the church for more than forty years. The writer's mother, Ora Lee Jones Beattie taught her how to line long and short-metered Dr. Watts, hymns and recite welcomes in the church that got standing ovations and applauds. It was in the church where she developed her gift of memorization of Scriptures and public speaking. Moreover, the writer was the church musician and the other siblings along with her mother made up the church's choir. The opportunity to serve as secretary of the Sunday school and president of the choir fostered the self-empowered leadership skills and the desire she needed to succeed. The Church was probably her greatest influence in her life outside of her God given mentors.

Within the Baptist church where the writer's father was the pastor she accepted Christ after she heard her father preach a powerful sermon. The writer, Janie Dowdy-Dandridge recalls a strong conviction to walk out from her seat and give the preacher her

hand and give her life to Christ. Although she grew up in the home of a strict Baptist preacher as a (PK) preacher's kid, the writer seldom missed Sunday school, prayer meeting, Bible study, evening services, or Baptist Training Union. By the age of 16, the writer realized her father's over-protective, controlling style of parenting and old-fashioned viewpoints were so antiquated she could not wait to move out of her parent's home to discover her true sense of purpose and sense of identity.

For several years, the writer's life was plagued by death, defeat, and discouragement. As the writer searched for ways to put her life back together, she discovered God was in control of her destiny as she journeyed from brokenness to wholeness through all of her bittersweet life experiences. Like *Humpty Dumpty* she found a common ground in a quandary of tragedy, for she too was at one time whole and complete.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,  
all the king's horses and all the king's men could not put Humpty  
together again.<sup>14</sup>

As early as fourteen years of age, the writer began working her first job as the water girl on her father's cotton field bus. She carried buckets of water to supply the needs of the field hand laborers as they worked long hours in the hot sun in the cotton fields of Tennessee. Water was heavy and carrying it for a short or long time was not easy. Sometimes she lost the dipper or trash got into the bucket as she walked the long cotton fields rows to quench the thirst of the workers. She learned early how to be an

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<sup>14</sup>Patricia H. Rushford, *The Humpty Dumpty Syndrome: Putting Yourself Back Together Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell A Division of Baker Book House, 1994), 15.

entrepreneur; it was her assignment to make and sell hot and cold sandwiches, moon pies, and cold drinks to the field workers. At an early age, she became aware that her strength came from within. Her mother, Ora Lee Jones Beattie, who was a devout Christian woman had a ninth grade education, never worked, never learned how to drive a car; taught her how to make a way out of no way. The writer remembers watching her mother take hand-me-down, second-hand clothes from her mother's best friend, Mrs. Rosa Haskins and make them look like brand new fashion items from designer department stores. Mentoring and role modeling came early in the life of the writer. When she decided to be a Brownie or a Girl Scout, she answered the call. However, the writer never had the privilege of wearing a brand new uniform. All her mother had to do was pick up the phone and call Mrs. Haskins and she would deliver one of her second-hand, freshly starched and ironed uniforms from the thrift store.

In the meantime, while working in the cotton fields of Tennessee as a young teenage girl, the writer met Constance Teresa Rockingham, Ph.D., or Connie as everyone affectionately called her. They later became very good friends. Connie mentored the writer. She was her role model. She taught the writer how to be frugal with money and always encouraged her to strive to be her best self. Most importantly, she taught her the importance of pursuing her academic goals. She wanted so much to be like Connie but because of her controlling father and her parent's limited income, she could not afford to go to a four-year college or university. After high school she enrolled in a technical school and pursued a career in business technology.

During her formative years, it was the writer's life's dream to become a professional model. However, her dreams were shattered when she developed blistered

sores all over her legs. Meanwhile as scabs formed on her legs, sometime later they dropped off and left ugly dark spots. Feeling defeated and discouraged, the writer participated in school drama programs, fashion shows, and played with her childhood toys while her friends made fun of the spots on her legs. With a posture of sadness that comes from head and heart, she walked around with the dark speckled blemishes on her legs dealing with shame and the possibility of never seeing her dream realized as a professional model. Although the writer made sever attempts to get rid of the spots that made her feel like an ugly duckling, nothing seemed to work. She tried bleaching creams, and thick foundational make; her mother also rubbed her legs with olive oil and anointed them daily trying to get rid of the dark discolored spots. Likewise, she wore two and three pairs of hosiery to cover the spots on her legs.

Although the writer felt like the most unattractive girl on the block with polka dotted legs, her heart ached for the opportunity of becoming the next America's Top Model. Perhaps more importantly, the spirit of depression, discouragement, and defeat set in. At any rate, this was the beginning of her problems with lack of self worth and low self-esteem. Meanwhile, in the back of her mind the writer held onto hope that the spots would disappear, and they did.

Married at the age of eighteen, shortly after graduating from high school, the writer united with her high school sweetheart. The marriage relationship ended in divorce. Approximately two years after the divorce from her first husband, she was united for a second time to a very abusive man. The marriage ended in divorce and the writer relocated. Seven weeks after relocating to Nashville, the writer married her third husband. He became unfaithful and she divorced him. A driving force in her life was

rejection, being told she would never make it, she would never amount to anything and she would never succeed in life. The writer completed her Bachelors of Arts Degree from American Baptist College in Nashville, Tennessee, received her Master of Divinity Degree from Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Shawnee, Kansas and now is now enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Degree program at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Like most young girls, the writer never gave up on her dream of becoming a professional model. She knew if she was to succeed, it called for courage, commitment, and confidence. The writer's dream of becoming a professional model was not all about glitz and glamour. Learning to how to walk on the runway, work the room, do basic turns and pivots were valuable lessons of strength, self-assertiveness and resilience; all of which prepared the writer to emerge from being shy and timid to being a stronger, spiritually fulfilled, woman of God.

While the writer was employed at Bell South Telecommunications, she met Reverend Dr. Bettye J. Alston who had been a professional model, entrepreneur and owned a modeling enterprise. Granted the fact the writer was still dealing with self-esteem issues, Reverend Alston asked the writer to become a part of her modeling enterprise. By this time, the writer is in her mid-twenties and the dark ugly spots have disappeared. She does not recall how or when, but this opportunity moved the writer a step closer to fulfilling her life's dream of becoming a professional model. Reverend Alston became her mentor, role model in ministry and a very good friend. In fact, it was her mentor, Reverend Alston who taught her how to do pivots and turns and execute catwalks on the runway. Reverend Alston also prophesied into her life that God had a call

on her life to preach the gospel. The writer was a young woman who grew up in a culture where it was not customary for women to preach; to pastor a church was not a popular thing to do. However, God's yes was louder than her no. Although her father was deceased, the writer could hear her father's voice asking her, *if God called you to preach what are you going to do?* Likewise, after the writer answered and accepted her call to preach, she began modeling her life after her mentor, Reverend Alston who was a savvy business woman and pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and also happily married to her soul-mate, Reverend Neasbie Alston. In addition to all that has been stated, the writer and Reverend Alston both share a mutual passion to preach for empowerment, addressing impediments that keep us from progressing as a faith community and preaching for change and renewal in the congregational life of the church. To that end, Reverend Alston's theological seminary training, experiences in life as a single mother, her military training and her training as a Registered Nurse equipped her to mentor other women in ministry for spiritual wholeness of the mind, body and spirit, in a holistic approach to church growth and development.

The writer accepted God's call on her life to preach despite her struggle in the predominately male only fraternity for preachers. The writer never lost sight of her life's purpose as a preacher/pastor/counselor who happened to be a woman in a society that was yet divided along gender issues and heavily influenced by patriarchal dominance. This was a clear-cut example where healing and wholeness was needed in the writer's life. The writer accepted her call to ministry at the age of 36, shortly after the death of her father and ex-husband who was murdered. The writer announced her call to preach in a Baptist church where it was not popular for women to preach and where women were

denied access to the pulpit. She recalls standing on the floor to acknowledge to the congregation what God had confirmed in dreams, visions and through God's Word. According to Isaiah 61:1-11, the writer spoke with writerity, boldness and delivered prophetic words from the Prophet Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,<sup>3</sup> and provide for those who grieve in Zion, to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. And you will be called priests of the LORD; you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting joy will be yours. For I, the LORD, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the LORD has blessed. I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so

the Sovereign LORD will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.<sup>15</sup>

At the onset of her calling and ministry, the writer, realized that there was a dire need to be theologically trained to confront the needs of today's issues in a continuous paradigm-shifting world. She believed that one who is called to preach the gospel must undertake thorough preparation and education, and theological training. The Christian Ministry is not to be taken lightly, but with serious and critical preparation to serve in the present age, recognizing how culturally, theologically and socially different the church is changing. Regardless of gender, God called the writer to give meaning, purpose, and direction to the total person, to serve as an advocate for women and men of all races, creeds and ethnic backgrounds, empowering individuals to take inventory and reassessing their gifts, talents and abilities.

The writer's call experience has been a defining moment in her life as she transitioned from a life of shame to self-empowerment. The writer knew God was with her and God's presence was manifested the day she announced her call to preach the Gospel. Shortly after the acknowledgement of her call to preach and being denied the opportunity to preach, the writer left her Baptist roots in her home church and began to search for a place where she could be affirmed, loved and given a chance to share her gifts and graces.

After being denied licensing by the Baptist church, a dear friend of the family, Reverend Lawrence Risby licensed and ordained her to preach. After receiving her license and ordination four years later, the writer found favor in the African Methodist

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<sup>15</sup>Is 61:1-11.

Episcopal Church where she was re-obligated, ordained an Itinerant deacon in 1994 by Bishop Vernon Randolph Byrd and later ordained an Itinerant Elder in 1996 by Bishop Hamel Hartford Brookins at Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Clarksville, Tennessee. On one particular occasion, Presiding Elder Freeman Marco Cooper considered asking the writer to serve as a supply pastor. After much prayer and fasting, the writer was assigned to pastor her first church, Wayman Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, a small rural community in Murray, Kentucky. This began the writer's humble journey in the pastoral ministry.

In October of 2008 the writer was appointed by Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie of the 13<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District to serve as the new pastor of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church, a congregation that is comprised of one hundred and seven members.

The writer draws on her strength to make bricks out of straw as she has served as the pastor of several small rural and suburban churches in the African Methodist Episcopal Church under the leadership of her mentor and present Bishop, Reverend Dr. Vashti Murphy McKenzie, and Presiding Prelate of the 13<sup>th</sup> Episcopal District. The writer of this project has struggled against all odds with the oppressive enemies of racism, classism, and sexism for twenty five years in ministry. Steven Covey, writer of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, says in order for us to understand the world and interpret others, one must first understand our own paradigms and how to make a

paradigm shift.<sup>16</sup> Covey goes on to suggest, the word paradigm come from the Greek.<sup>17</sup> It was originally a scientific term, and is more commonly used today to mean a model, theory, perception, assumption or frame of reference.<sup>18</sup> Today the writer, sees herself as a model of healing and wholeness open to new perceptions, interpretations and understandings if the church is to prepare for growth and change. The church cannot maintain a healthy and holistic frame of reference if she fails to be apart of the paradigm shift of church renewal for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, the Prophet Isaiah is correct in his prophetic assessment as he says in Isaiah 43:19, “Behold, I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

As far back as the writer can remember she has been taking the initiative to learn new paradigms for her own personal and professional development. Self-autonomy has been one of her strengths. Her primary concern has been to build on her own personal strength, value differences. Taking the initiative of self directed learning as Patricia Cranton describes it in her book *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers and Adults* is a goal, a process, and a learner characteristic that changes with the nature of the learning.<sup>19</sup> The writer’s personal autonomy to learn, grow, and be self-empowered began in the home. Her gifts and graces were later fostered in the church. From her earliest accounts of the importance of life together in the family

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<sup>16</sup>Steven R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster), 23.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>19</sup>Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass A Wiley Company), 56.

and life in the church, the writer has a clear understanding of addressing the complexities of what it has meant to foster authentic relationships and share in the joy, sorrow, and pain, and struggles communally. Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church is a congregation that is in grief denial. The congregation was afraid of letting go in order to move forward to have a thriving and vital ministry. When a church is in denial about grief; the spiritual, emotional and relational health of the congregation slowly dies.

The spirit of death, defeat and discouragement caused the church to vassilate in maintenance mode. This was not acceptable. The writer understands a time of mourning can be a healthy process. If the church develops a strategic heart for worship, the congregation can live out her mission as the church practices loving your neighbor as yourself. Most importantly, if the church reclaims the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ, a healthier and holistic congregation shall materialize. In Matthew 28:20 the command “Go and make disciples given by Jesus Christ teaching them to observe all things and lo I will be with you to the end of the age” is a crucial factor in identifying the project’s hypothesis.

Delores Williams raises the consciousness of Womanist Theology in her book *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*. Williams also challenges the oppression Black women and the struggle to survive. In a positive effort to reconstruct a new theology for Black women, Williams affirms the identification of the defining characteristics of womanist theology bears repeating:

Womanist theology attempts to help black women see, affirm, and have confidence in the importance of their experience and faith for determining the character of the Christian religion in the African American community. Womanist theology challenges all oppressive forces impending black women’s struggle for survival

and for the development of a positive, productive quality of life conducive to women's and the family's freedom and wellbeing. Womanist theology opposes all oppression based on race, sex, sexual preference, physical disability, and caste.<sup>20</sup>

The writer sees herself as one who is not afraid to challenge stereotypical roles predominantly held by male constituents in leadership positions in the church and community. The womanist theological perspectives connect themes of motherhood, poverty, homelessness, the expandability of Black women and children to the story of Hagar and the experiences of African American women.<sup>21</sup> The writer shapes her theology around the womanist theological perspectives based on her life's struggles and her strength to challenge, confront, and survive the dominance of the *good old boys* church games.

Shortly after being assigned as the new pastor of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church, the church was in need of a conversion experience. Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III argues conversion is a very important part of Christian spirituality.<sup>22</sup> To put it bluntly, according to Stewart, in order for the church to be reenergized, the church needed a conversion experience from the constraints of institutionalism and organized religion to the practice of wholesome vital, energized spirituality.<sup>23</sup>

The members of Webb Grove AME Church never moved beyond their love of worshipping their new building, annual programs, board meetings, and the way they have

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<sup>20</sup>Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), xiv.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Carlyle Fielding Stewart, III. *Reclaiming What Was Lost: Recovering Spiritual Vitality in the Mainline Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 25.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

always done things with in the life of the both churches. The writer believed the congregation needed was a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit to revitalize a new spirit within the church. This would create new prototypes for doing ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to provide vitality and sustainability. The writer agrees with Thomas G. Bandy as he writes in *Kicking Habits: Welcome Relief for Addicted Churches*, the church is not a collection of programs, but an organic whole and people must grasp the larger picture of how the whole system succeeds or fails.<sup>24</sup>

Although Webb Grove AME Church merged back in 1993, the church has vacillated. If the congregation is to recover its spiritual vitality for church growth, the church will need to have a reconversion experience. Old models of ministry are not effective in producing ministry that is vitally sustainable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The aforementioned was evident according to the writer that although some changes took place, they were insincere and shallow.

As an African American female pastor and the first for this congregation, the writer recognized the importance of empowering leadership, sharing visions, and building relationships to live in harmony with each other. Building relationships to live in harmony at Webb Grove AME Church evolves out of the motto of the African Methodist Episcopal Church: God our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, Holy Spirit Our Comforter and Humankind Our Family.

The evolvement of our motto demonstrates the importance of developing theological as well as meaningful relationships that speak to the needs of whole people of

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<sup>24</sup>Thomas G. Bandy, *Kicking Habits: Welcome Relief for Addicted Churches* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 16.

God. Some of her greatest lessons learned evolved around power and control. The dichotomy of power and control has the ability to influence, corrupt, and create conflict in the life of the church. The writer's courage to be bold and authentic, lead with the power to inspire self, others and also function as a servant leader has brought healing and wholeness into the writer's life as she journeyed through shame, guilt and a painful past. Although painful vignettes of bitterness have marked her journey, her many mentors have encouraged her to forgive, love God, self and others and let go of the past. More than anything, the writer knows she was called to a ministry of transformational leadership. One scripture that stands out in her mind is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these' (Mk 12:30-31).

Donald Hilliard offers insight in the book, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, as he sanctions an important factor that determines church growth; a church's propensity to love.<sup>25</sup> Hilliard's premise for church growth is adopted from the biblical model found in Acts 2:42-47.

Luke the physician, the writer of the Book of Acts describes life in the first century community in this way:

And they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together

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<sup>25</sup>Donald Hilliard, Jr., *Church Growth from an African American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 84.

with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.<sup>26</sup>

Critically examining the biblical model of ministry found in Acts 2:42-47 clearly depicts that the early church was a church of community, prayer, attentiveness to the Word of God, compassion, unity, worship, and fellowship.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the writer recommended a strategic plan to heal relationships in the church through worship, Bible study, sermons and focus group fellowships based on this text to her congregation.

It is constant communion with one another that the writer understands the importance of keeping covenant with God and community. Michael I. N. Dash and Christine D. Chapman highlights in *The Shape of Zion: Leadership and Life in Black Churches* the significance of covenant relationship in community in both the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures.<sup>28</sup> Lovett H. Weems Jr. points out in *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity*, team building is similar to the establishment and development of community within a congregation.<sup>29</sup> Weems goes on to point out according to Evelyn Easton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, community in its simplest term is a gathering of people who support one another's performance; community is a place where we learn how to hold one another.<sup>30</sup> Weems stresses the

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<sup>26</sup>Acts: 2 42-47.

<sup>27</sup>Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 11-12.

<sup>28</sup>Michael I. N. Dash and Christine D. Chapman, *The Shape of Zion: Leadership and Life in Black Church* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 23.

<sup>29</sup>Lovett H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, And Integrity* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 70.

<sup>30</sup>James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Easton Whitehead, *The Promise of Partnership* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1991), 211.

importance of community as he underscores in his book *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture and Integrity* what John W. Gardner writer of *On Leadership* brings to light about community: Gardner notes, “What we think of as a failure of leadership on the contemporary scene may be traceable to a breakdown in the sense of community.”<sup>31</sup> Gardner further states leaders are community builders because they have to be.<sup>32</sup> He suggests the following ingredients of community:

1. Wholeness incorporating diversity
2. Shared culture
3. Good internal communication
4. Caring, trust, and teamwork
5. Group maintenance and government
6. Participation and the sharing of leadership tasks
7. Development of young people
8. Links with the outside world<sup>33</sup>

One way to build the team effectively according to Weems is *love the people*.<sup>34</sup>

Nothing is more important than relationships.<sup>35</sup> Everything begins with the transformation of the heart. However, Bruce Fisher an internationally renowned divorce therapist taught relationships and divorce recovery seminars for over 25 years and writer

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<sup>31</sup>John W. Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1990), 112-118.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Weems, *Church Leadership: Vision, Team*, 88.

<sup>35</sup>Tom Holladay, *The Relationship Principles of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 23.

of *Loving Choices: An Experience in Growing Relationships*, writes, the challenge for most individuals is to get the heart and mind to work together in balance.<sup>36</sup> Fisher further comments, the result can be a more meaningful, rewarding, fulfilling, freeing, healthy, intimate life with yourself and others.

Murfreesboro, Tennessee is one of the fastest growing areas in Middle, Tennessee and the county seat of Rutherford County. Situated 35 miles outside of Nashville, Murfreesboro is identified as a small suburban town but yet large enough to be considered one of the fastest growing cities in the country. Murfreesboro began as an agricultural community and got its name from Hardee Murfree. Historically, the city of Murfreesboro suffered severe trauma during the Civil War era. In 1911 a merger occurred with the Tennessee Middle College for Women and the Middle Tennessee State Normal School a two year school for training teachers. The school grew and later it progressed into Middle State University, the home of the Middle Tennessee State Blue Raiders.

In the Barfield area of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church is located in the suburban rural areas of the Barfield community. The Barfield community is a close knit thriving community populated by newly developing subdivisions with a growing sense of community surrounded by the city gone country landscaped scenery from the Wilderness Station in the Barfield Crescent Park. About a quarter of a mile from the Barfield Crescent Park and School is Webb Grove AME Church. Under the leadership of the former pastor, the late Reverend Leland H. Webster,

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<sup>36</sup>Bruce Fisher, *Loving Choices: An Experience in Growing Relationships* (Atascadero, CA: Impact Publishers), 23.

two congregations merged in 1993 to form one church under the new name Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church.

While Cedar Grove AME Church's land was purchased by the Department of Transportation it was recommended by the late Presiding Elder, William Forrest Scruggs to merge Cedar Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church with Webb Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Church Cedar Grove AME Church agreed to the merger and relocated to their present location 3996 Barfield Crescent Road Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Presently the church sits on five acres of land in the Barfield Community adjacent to where the old Church Webb Chapel AMEC was located.

There are currently 50,155 persons residing in the Barfield area of Murfreesboro, Tennessee where the church is located. This represents an increase of 21,197 or 73% since 1990. During the same period of time, the U. S. as a whole grew by 23.3%. It is projected that between 2010 and 2015, the population will increase by 13.7% or 6,878 additional persons. During the same period, the U. S. population is projected to grow by 5.1%<sup>37</sup>

In the Barfield area of Murfreesboro, Tennessee and surrounding the area, Webb Grove is located in the top three quarters of the population resides in approximately 100% of the geographical area. In the U. S. as a whole and in the average community, the top 75% of the population resides in just 25% of the populated geographical area. In comparison, the study area population is highly dispersed within the overall area.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>2010, Percept Group Inc., <http://www.percept.info> Sources: Percept, Census Bureau, Claritas v20.1a (accessed June 2011).

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

Based upon the number of different lifestyles in the Barfield area the lifestyle diversity is very high with 31 of the 50 U. S. Lifestyles segments represented. Of the six major segment groupings, the largest is referred to as Middle American Families, which accounts for 44.9% of the households in the area. The top individual segment is Established Country families representing 32.2% of all households.<sup>39</sup>

While the area is a highly diverse community, Anglos represent 83.3% of the population and all other racial/ethnic groups make up just 126.7%, which is well below the national average of 35%. The largest of these groups are African American, which account for 8.1% of the total population. Hispanics/Latinos are projected to be the fastest growing group increasing by 42.5% between 2010 and 2015.<sup>40</sup>

The most significant group in terms of numbers and comparison to national averages is Survivors (age 29-49) who make up 31.3% of the total population in the Barfield area of Murfreesboro, Tennessee compared to 29.2% of the U. S. population as a whole. Overall the surrounding area can be described as very traditional in family structure due to the average presence of married persons and two-parent families.<sup>41</sup> Based upon the number of years completed and college enrollment, the overall education level in the Barfield area of Murfreesboro is somewhat low. While 84.1% of the population aged 25 and over have graduated from high school as compared to the national average of

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

80.4%, college graduates accounts for 25.9% of those over 24 in the area versus 24.4% in the U. S.<sup>42</sup>

Within the surrounding proximity of Webb Grove, the concerns which are likely to exceed the national average include: Finding A Good Church, Finding Spiritual Teaching, Achieving A Fulfilling Marriage, Problems in Schools, Divorce and Parenting Skills. As an overall category, concerns related to Hopes and Dreams are the most significant based upon the total number of households and comparison to national averages.<sup>43</sup> While there are a number of household concerns that exceed the national average, conditions that contribute to placing an area at risk (Particularly, the children) are at an overall somewhat low level. This is evidenced by noting that on the whole the area is somewhat below average in the characteristics known to contribute to community problems such as households below poverty line, adults without a high school diploma, households with a single mother and unusually high concern about issues, such as community problems, family problems, and/or basic necessities such as food, housing and jobs. Based upon the assumption that as a group of people become older and more diverse, the potential for resistance to change becomes more significant, the Barfield community of Murfreesboro area's potential resistance is likely to be somewhat high.<sup>44</sup>

Overall, the likely faith involvement level and preference for historic Christian religious affiliation is very high when compared to the national average. Based upon the average household of \$64,485.00 per year and the likely contribution behavior in the

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

Barfield community of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, the overall religious giving potential can be described as somewhat high.<sup>45</sup> Based upon the overall church styles of worship, music, and architectural style preferences, the overall church style preference can be described as somewhat traditional.<sup>46</sup> Church program preferences, which are likely to exceed the national average, include: Bible Study and Prayer Groups, Marriage Enrichment Opportunities, Parent Training Programs and Youth Social Group Programs. As an overall category, programs related to Spiritual Development are the most significant based upon total number of households and comparison to national averages.

The problem in this model of ministry has evolved as a result of the spirit of death, defeat and discouragement since the congregational merger, relocation, and name change occurred from Webb Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Cedar Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church to Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1993 the two congregations united for the purpose of becoming a unified body and having a common ground for worship. Although both congregations had good intentions to move forward, the two congregations failed to attain a shared vision, mission, and values and grasp an understanding of its new identity. It was difficult to cope with what they had lost and what the loss meant to them. Webb Grove AME Church was afraid to make the transition and move forward to embrace a new ethos. In addition to the aforementioned, the congregation also abandoned its mutual accountability for each other when she failed to have faith and trust in God. Webb Grove AME Church

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

forgot it was God who helped them to build a debt-free church with limited human and financial resources.

Webb Grove AME Church was initially in love with each other and excited at the completion of their new church building, new name and their collaborative partnership in ministry; however, she lost her focus as the congregation focused more on the external construction of brick and mortar rather than focusing on participating in God's mission (*the missio dei*) for the church and community, saving souls, making disciples and rebuilding lives. In so many ways, the pain of death, defeat and discouragement overpowered the church's ability to experience a new life together in partnership with God. Unfortunately, the writer, like the merged congregation at one time lost her passion, lived in denial concerning her attachment to controlling and co-dependent people and experienced a love crisis in her life until she discovered a sense of purpose and direction and experienced the loving forgiveness of God.

Although the congregation appeared to be healthy externally, the church was sick and dying. Both individual congregations were yet going through a grief process and were in total denial of their pain. Because of excessive pain, anger, and grief, when the writer arrived, she discovered the congregations were still experiencing grief. The writer identified the areas of loss of identity, conflict, control, brokenness, abuse, trauma, violence, divorce, death, defeat, discouragement, unfaithfulness, co-dependency, and other relational, personal, and social concerns within the congregational life of the church that managed to exist after the congregational merger and relocation. Likewise, the writer has dealt with some of the same systemic issues in her journey of self-discovery in her own personal renewal and transformation to wholeness. Seeing that the writer's

congregation was in need of being resurrected from the reality of death, defeat and discouragement, the writer sees herself in the context at Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal as a wounded healer. As a wounded healer, the writer has been called to this context at Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal to restore, redeem and release and reclaim congregational vitality that once existed. Bringing closure to the pain of loss of identity will allow healing to take place.

One of the first things the writer did upon her arrival as the new pastor was to celebrate and honor the former pastor. This made it easier for the members to bond with the new pastor. Recognizing what the church was about to experience in the loss of their pastor who had been with them for seventeen years, the writer believed a celebration of honor would help to heal their wounded spirits.

The writer's journey of pain, loss, abuse, and rejection prepared her to provide healing and wholeness where two hearts of two individual churches came together with individual aims to honor the best of their history, culture and identity. While each congregation has its own church culture and identity, the writer understands no two congregations are alike. Nancy T. Ammerman, states in an essay, "Culture and Identity in the Congregation," in the book, *Studying Congregations A New Handbook*, "unlike our usual notions about identity, a culture is neither who we always will be nor who we ought to be." It is who we are and all the ways we ought to be. It is who we are and all the ways in which we reinforce and recreate who we are.<sup>47</sup> Ammerman further suggest culture

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<sup>47</sup>Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney. *Studying Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 78.

includes the congregation's history and stories of its heroes.<sup>48</sup> It is shaped by the culture in which its members live (represented by their demographics characteristics) but it takes on its own unique identity and character when those members come together.<sup>49</sup>

Nancy Ammerman, Jackson Carroll, Carl Dudley and William McKinney, in their *Handbook for Congregational Studies*, say it is not unusual, in fact, for the people who gather into a congregation to share a common social and cultural heritage.<sup>50</sup> Nancy Ammerman and company goes on to say congregations are likely to speak the same language with the same accent.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, they are likely to be quite similar in educational, occupational, and status backgrounds.<sup>52</sup> They further suggest that a congregation's identity is a result of the elaborate communication among its members through which they shape perception of themselves, their church and the world—communities in which they develop and follow common values and they engage in corporate recollection, action and anticipation.<sup>53</sup>

With that in mind, healing and wholeness occurred for the writer when she met the love of her life; two hearts came together by divine intervention when the writer met her soul mate and partner in marriage and ministry on July 1, 2000. This relationship is a model of a merger of two individuals coming together in a covenant relationship of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 80.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

koinonia fellowship as in the early church. Nevertheless, it is the goal of the synergy and context to collectively bring together the life experiences of the writer and the significant events of the congregation.

The early church focused on the innovation of the Holy Spirit; creating healthy and holistic interrelationships of community and communion through mutual care and accountability for each other, forgiveness and loving relationships, prayer and the proclamation of the gospel. Seeking to bring about systemic change through discipleship and evangelism, programs can emerge in the life of the congregation to recapture the love and unity that once existed to one another and to God. Something had to be done to create a healthier and holistic sense of *koinonia* fellowship as in the early church, which is often overlooked in many of our churches. By definition *koinonia* is defined as the companionship of persons on equal and friendly terms. It means company; a society; the state of being together or sharing mutual participation; common interest or common purpose.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT

When a congregation is healthy it is able to cope with change in order to make the necessary transitions in a healthy church merger. Healthy collaboration requires trusting people who respect one another, listen to one another, express their thoughts openly and continue to grow.<sup>1</sup> Congregational development and developing new faith communities is a holistic approach to nurture long term health, and spirituality vitality to help congregations find clarity in understanding their mission and purpose as a missional church.

A missional church can be define as the mission Dei; a missional church lives out the church's three-dimensional calling: to be upwardly focused on God in worship that is passionate; to be inwardly focused on community among believers that is demonstrated in relationships of love and compassion; and to be upwardly focused on a world that does not yet know God inwardly focused.<sup>2</sup>

The literature review suggests some of the most emerging Church Leaders, consultants and emergent voices of practitioners are concerned about the health of plateaued or declining congregations. Sally Helgensen, author of *The Web of Inclusion: A New Architecture for Building Great Organizations* developed a theory that by building a

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<sup>1</sup>Norma deWaal Malefyt and Howard Vanderwell, *Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005), 14.

<sup>2</sup>Handout from Christian Formation Class, Dr. Ircel Harrison, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Shawnee, Kansas. 2010. From Building Small Groups.

web of inclusion it means ideas come from everyone, not just from the top-down; that what individuals do in the workplace depends on their talents, not on their titles<sup>3</sup> Helgensen's emphasis is on models, not a single model.<sup>4</sup> Helgensen argument is the web of inclusion, because it is organic, configures differently for different organizations in order to reflect the strengths and talents of people at every level.<sup>5</sup> She goes on to say, because it is defined as much by its process, by how it works, as by patterns it suggests, the web may be best understood as a guiding set of principles and attitudes.<sup>6</sup> It permits the organization to shift and adapt to changing circumstances, while remaining open at parameters and constantly pulling people into the decision making process.<sup>7</sup>

Webs of inclusion encourage people to redefine their work, and allow for flexibility and responsiveness.<sup>8</sup> By nature Helgensen adds, the web of inclusion is constantly evolving.<sup>9</sup> Helgensen's model developed from the architectural resemblance to a spider's web.<sup>10</sup> She points out that the interweaving structure of the spider web has structures inextricably integrated and connected patterns of relationships. She calls this term inclusion because the women who led in her organization labored continuously to bring everyone at every point closer to the center—to tighten ties, provide increased

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<sup>3</sup>Sally Helgensen, *The Web of Inclusion: A New Architecture for Building Great Organizations* (New York, NY: Doubleday Dell Publishing group, Inc., 1995), 20.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 20.

exposure and encourage greater participation.<sup>11</sup> Much like the spider web, the structures are continually being built up, stretched, altered, modified and transformed.<sup>12</sup>

Today, many congregations have a web of common congregational problems that can be handled differently to reduce conflict within the church if there is a greater participation of inclusion. Looking at how the church family works, the writer sees Webb Grove AME Church as dysfunctional family system in need of a model of inclusion.

Reclaiming the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ, evangelism, and discipleship can lead to healthy and holistic congregational leadership. Tom Johnston, Executive Director of The Praxis Center for Church development, as well as church planter and Lead Pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Manchester, New Hampshire along with Mike Perkinson, Lead Pastor of Living Hope Fellowship states, community is the highest and finest expression of *koinonia* (*fellowship*) in the Kingdom *now*.<sup>13</sup> Most think of the church as being a place (*the house of God*) in which the community of faith gather for worship.<sup>14</sup> Johnston and Perkinson declare community is how discipleship happens.<sup>15</sup>

This project is about a congregational merger and relocation of two declining congregations. While there is a clarion call and cry for congregational leaders to be healthy and heard, the writer of this project ascertained shortly after the first year of her pastoral appointment, each individual congregation was still quite different in culture,

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Tom Johnston and Mike Chong Perkinson, *A New Testament Trilogy* (Manchester, NH: Church Smart Resources, 2005), 94.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

and methods and each congregation had different views about the mission and purpose of the church. Robert L. Perry, Associate Director of Organizational Health Associates writes in the book *Congregational Wellness*, put people together and inevitably anxiety will arise.<sup>16</sup>

In addition, Perry argues, anxiety can be infectious.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Peter Steinke suggests we should think of the church in terms of biblical metaphors.<sup>18</sup>

It is the body of Christ, the New Israel, and shepherd and flock. Moreover, Steinke adds, we use the metaphors of warmth and relationship to describe the church a community, a family, and a gathering of caring people. Although from time to time there is discord in the church, congregations become bitter. Bitterness and tension causes stress in the human body; similar to the intense anxiety within the congregational life of the church. In the book, *How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregational as Emotional Systems*, Peter Steinke states, as long as people gather and interact, emotional systems are inherently present.<sup>19</sup> Bonding together as a church family is the goal of congregational wellness (healing and wholeness) for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph 4:13). Christ mission in the world is to bring wholeness.

As the congregation at Webb Grove joins together with mutual care and respect for each other, the unity of the body will create a loving covenant with each other. Peter Steinke states, a healthy church family system is one that actively and responsibly

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<sup>16</sup>Robert L. Perry, *Congregational Wellness: Help for Broken Churches* (Richmond, VA: Organizational Health associates, 1996), 52.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Peter L. Steinke, *How Your Church family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems* (Herndon, VA, 2006), xiii.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

addresses or heals its disturbances, not one with an absence of troubles.<sup>20</sup> Steinke, continues by declaring, the measure of wellness then, is not based on the lack of problems, but rather the creativity and effectiveness with the congregation as it solves its problems.<sup>21</sup>

Today, many congregations have a web of common congregational problems. Looking at how the church family works, the writer sees Webb Grove as a dysfunctional family system. Peter Steinke defines systems as a way of thinking about life as all of a piece.<sup>22</sup> It is a way of thinking how the whole is arranged, how its parts interact, and how the relationships between the parts produce something new.<sup>23</sup> According to Robert Perry, in the book *Congregational Wellness*, he writes, “Wellness issues for congregations can be described utilizing the analogy of the human body.”<sup>24</sup> Perry’s family system’s approach has to do with having a heart for motivation. Perry is firmly grounded in the fact that when a church has a failure of healthy heart functions, the congregation loses its motivation.<sup>25</sup> Just as the heart pumps the vital fluid of life through the body, enabling the body to move and work, when that pump stops or loses rhythm, meaningful and controlled movement may stop. A church that lacks motivation that lacks passion

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<sup>20</sup>Robert L. Perry, *Congregational Wellness: Help for Broken Churches* (Richmond, VA: Organizational Health associates, 1996), 5.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach* (New York City, NY: The Alban Institute, 1996), 3.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

becomes lethargic and lifeless.<sup>26</sup> Also if a church has respiratory problems the church fails to breathe, it soon dies.<sup>27</sup> It is an unhealthy church. If the congregation lacks love, passion, and spirit, and loses the meaning and mission of why the Church exists, then Christ's mission has been in vain. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, renowned Christian Minister, and Seminary Professor states, "The church is the church only when it exists for others."<sup>28</sup> If this is true, what is the church doing to restore the mission of the Christian community called the Church and what has happened to the spiritual vitality of worship with God as the central focus of worship? When worship is authentic, mission and purpose evolves.

As a psychologist, pastoral counselor, and a religious educator, Wayne Oates, combines family systems theory with biblically based approaches to provide healing and wholeness in caring for troublesome parishioners. Oates suggests there are five personality types that create conflict in the church. He gives special attention to integrating biblical and theological insight as he focuses on various patterns and themes in a web of relationships in the church. Oates systems approach addresses these five personalities, (1) the behavior of people who go around behind the backs of others and say and do hurtful things; (2) deals with care of authoritarian, power driven people who are bent on controlling the course of events by imposing their will and influence on the church and its pastor and lay leaders; (3) competitive people who do not keep the rules of competition. They compete for self-serving reasons, especially for places in leadership in the life of the church; (4) the clinging vine, dependent types who overburden the pastor

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>28</sup>Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975), 24.

with their desire for him/her to make many or all of their decisions; (5) draw attention to the star performers in the church-life drama. They ignore the other players; they are soloists when teamwork is needed.<sup>29</sup>

The current and future state of church renewal, revitalization, and restoration has been at the heart of the reoccurring theme of healing and wholeness, unity, justice, liberation, and reconciliation within the congregational life of the church since the genesis of the renewal movement. It was the Roman Emperor, Constantine during the 4<sup>th</sup> Century who called the Christian community to return to the faith. Churches today are experiencing the same falling away as the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christians did in the Roman Catholic Church. While the Bible clearly states there will be a falling away from the faith, which can be characterized as *apostasy*. *A Great Falling Away*; it means a departure from the faith in God. Today, this cataclysm of rude awakening suggest congregations are pretending they want to encounter change within the congregational life of the church, while at the same time there is yet a deep desire to protect sacred buildings as members in congregations act as gatekeepers to connect only with people they want to become a part of their closed clique fellowships.

First of all, the church is not the building nor is it a program. Sometimes congregations forget what business they are in and they also have a tendency to forget who they are as a church. Oftentimes, church members find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle with a myopic view of not letting any new members become a part of their family system and they try to control the old family system that is already in place.

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<sup>29</sup>Wayne E. Oates, *The Care of Troublesome People* (Louisville, KY: Wayne E. Oates Institute, 2007), 18.

It seems as if the church has forgotten that the church is a body and a family made up of individuals who are perpetually in a process of social, personal, and spiritual transformation. Mike Slaughter, Lead Pastor of Ginghamburg United Methodist Church and author of *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus*, articulates the word *church* is generally understood as a building.<sup>30</sup> Slaughter writes in his book, there are no references to church buildings for the first two hundred years of the church's existence.<sup>31</sup> Slaughter adds the Greek word *ecclesia* (church) refers to a summoned or called-forth group of people.<sup>32</sup> The word was not used exclusively by the Christian church.<sup>33</sup> It was the principal assembly of the democracy of ancient Athens during its Golden Age (480-404 B.C.E.).<sup>34</sup> These were the representatives who were summoned out from the general population for a political mission.<sup>35</sup> The word as it described the church was referring to the community that Jesus summons to bear witness to the gospel and serve Jesus' mission in the world.<sup>36</sup>

According to Slaughter, architecture and space are irrelevant to Christian community and calling.<sup>37</sup> Although Mike Slaughter is grateful for the success of his many building projects and church mergers, he suggests churches must find creative ways to

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<sup>30</sup>Mike Slaughter, *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 107.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

minimize brick and maximize mission.<sup>38</sup> Howard A. Snyder writes in the book, *The*

*Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age*:

Christians did not begin to build church buildings until about AD 200. This fact suggests that, whatever else church buildings are good for, they are not essential for numerical growth or spiritual depth. The early church possessed both these qualities, and the church's greatest period of vitality and growth until recent times was during the first two centuries AD. In other words the church grew faster when it did not have the help—or hindrance—of church buildings.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, the church must find in the words of Martin Luther King the *Strength to Love* beyond self, especially those who are enemies of God and the church of Jesus Christ. Today, spiritual amnesia exists in the life of the church. We are living in a world that is spiritually dying without love. Crucial to the health of loving and growing churches, the church's failure to love God, self and others has caused a spiritual decline that is calling for the church and community to return to love. Diana L. Hayes proposes in her essay *My Hope Is In The Lord*, "As Christians we must become extremists in love, following in the footsteps of Jesus and the long line of saints and martyrs who followed after Him; following also that long line of strong, proud, and loving Black women who were able to run on for a long time."<sup>40</sup> Responding to such circumstances, Hayes asserts only in doing so we will recapture the spirit of the early church, which was not merely a thermostat that transformed the mores of society.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>39</sup>Howard Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1975), 69.

<sup>40</sup>Emilie M. Townes, ed., *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation And Transformation, essay My Hope Is In The Lord Diana L. Hayes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 24.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

Historically, African American women have been the ones who have kept the family together and have passed their faith inheritance on to the future church women and girls in the best of times and of course the worst of times. In the book, *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation* editor Emilie M. Townes draws attention to an essay written by Diana Hayes “My Hope In the Lord: Transformation and Salvation in the African American Community.” Hayes, an African American Catholic Womanist Theologian articulates in her essay says that it is not the responsibility of the Church to call us, the People of God who are, in its fullest understanding, the Church, to account; to call us back to a responsibility to love God and neighbor, the earth which sustains us as well as ourselves.<sup>42</sup> To shape the critical conversation, Hayes goes on to emphasize, “We were created to by God’s love in order to love each other and all of creation—a love which carries with it the responsibility to nurture and maintain rather than destroy.”<sup>43</sup> Hayes raises a relevant question for discussion and dialogue that is critical to the transformation process of healing and wholeness if the faith community is going to get back to reclaiming the mission of making disciples for Christ in order for a healthier and holistic community to materialize.

In breaking the silence on the doctrine of peace, justice and the love of your neighbor Hayes proposes the following questions: “What reason do we have to hope in today’s chaotic world? What is and should be the role of the Christian churches and all faith in attempting to heal the wounds; mental, physical, and spiritual with which our

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<sup>42</sup>Emilie M. Townes, ed., *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation And Transformation Essay My Hope Is In The Lord*, Diana L. Hayes (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 10.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

cities and our world have been and are being inflicted on a seemingly daily basis?<sup>44</sup> What hope is there in attempting to rebuild our cities and, more importantly, our souls so that at least those events in which humanity can be said to have played an instrumental role will not happen again?<sup>45</sup> She continues the conversation by concluding that today and always, religion, or more explicitly, people of faith have not only a critical role to play in rebuilding lives and spirits of the people of Los Angeles, Oklahoma City, Sarajevo, Jerusalem, Port-au-Prince, and wherever else chaos appears to have the upper hand; they have, more importantly, a responsibility to help influence the future of this nation and our world, global village, that it has become, guiding our tortured and seemingly increasingly devastated homelands on the human journey toward truly becoming the City of God, a world where all people, regardless of race, class, gender, or faith can live in peace and solidarity with one another and we will study war no more.<sup>46</sup>

Jesus spent three years of his ministry working closely with others committed to building authentic relationships deeply engaged instead of trying to live in a stained glass world isolated and disconnected from others. There are *no long rangers* and no *one is an island*. We need each other. Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, co-authors of *Called To Be Church: The Book of Acts For A New Day* shares a quote by Jim Wallis founder and editor of Sojourners magazine and community.

Wallis says the greatest need in our time is not simply for kerygma, the preaching of the gospel; nor for *diakonia*, service on behalf of justice; nor for charisma, the experience of the Spirit's gifts; nor even for *propheteia*, the challenging of the king. The greatest need for our time is *koinonia*, the call simply to be the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.,10.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

church, to love one another, and to offer our lives for the sake of the world. The creation of living, breathing, loving communities of faith at the local church level is the foundation of all other answers.<sup>47</sup>

Robinson and Wall note there has been in recent decades a rather abundant literature on church growth and decline.<sup>48</sup> It is equally important to say that particular attention has been given to the call to simply *be* the church. Robinson and Wall go on to state, the consistent witness of Scripture, however, is that God's attention is to form a people, a community, a visible body.<sup>49</sup> Contrary to what contemporary Westerners or Americans may imagine, the concern of Scripture is not the spiritual state of individuals, their holiness, or even their salvation.<sup>50</sup> To that end, they conclude by suggesting the focus is God's *ekklesia*, God's community taking form in the world, which even provides a new world and a new vision for those who share in it.<sup>51</sup>

For this reason, Ronald W. Richardson, in his book, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life*, argues people in the church, as in any group are intricately connected.<sup>52</sup> They exist in a system that is much bigger and more powerful than the individual members.<sup>53</sup> Church renewal professionals

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<sup>47</sup>Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be The Church: The Book of Acts For A New Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 2.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 26.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

agree mainline Protestant churches are in need of recovering their spiritual vitality if the church is going to recapture the passion she once had.

The writer concludes and agrees that the struggle continues for women in ministry and leadership positions in the church. At any rate, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, sociologist, and womanist theologian in the book, *If it Wasn't for the Women* elude, women played an integral role in the inrush of women in leadership positions in the church and church interrelated vocations.<sup>54</sup>

Gilkes further brings to mind women in American society are expected to be good managers.<sup>55</sup> She points out women organize and coordinate diverse schedules and activities within their families, and among the organizations and institutions with which family members are involved.<sup>56</sup> Work outside the home is often added to this responsibility while African American women usually work, manage their families, and if they are community workers, they participate in the struggles between the community and the dominant society. African American women for the most part know how to use their matriarchal creativity intermingled with compassion, commitment, character, and resilience as advocates of social change in the church and community to make bricks out of straw. Regardless of the levels of oppression, in spite of the cruel abuse and dehumanization to keep women silent, women refused to remain silent and secluded.

Therefore, there is an all-encompassing emerging literature review that calls for the church to recover and rediscover the church's missional ecclesiology. Approaching the work of the church and community from a Trinitarian perspective through Womanist

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<sup>54</sup>Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, *If It Wasn't for the Women: Black Women's Experience and Womanist Culture in Church and Community* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 16.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

lenses and voice needs to continue. After all, the church is always in the process of reforming, transforming and conforming; rethinking, restructuring, re-purposing and refocusing itself for the sole intent of equipping individuals for service in relationship to making disciples and evangelism in the Kingdom of God.

Peter Bellini, Assistant Professor in Missiology suggested during the January 2012 Doctoral Ministry Intensive Morning Plenary Session as he lectured on Revitalization Theories and Practices, stated revitalization has occurred since the beginning, but has only become a more formal area of study recently in missiology over the last fifty years and in sociology and anthropology over the last century.<sup>57</sup> Bellini further commented renewal is the work of the Holy Spirit; he continued by suggesting renewal begins and ends with the Holy Trinity; God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Bellini affirms, no pastor, no program, no building, no budget can make church renewal happen.<sup>58</sup>

In the book, *Pathway to Renewal: Practical Steps for Congregations*, Co-Authors Daniel P. Smith and Mary K. Sellon offer an understanding of the Congregational renewal as a renewal of the people's understanding of their relationship with God, their relationship with their community, and their calling.<sup>59</sup> Smith and Sellon both agree the aim of renewal is not a bigger building or high-tech worship or a slew of professional programs, but a new way of looking at church, the work of a congregation, and what it

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<sup>57</sup>Peter Bellini, Assistant Professor of Missiology, Lecturer during January 2012 Doctoral Ministry Intensive Plenary Session, *Revitalization Theories and Practices*, United Theological Seminary Dayton, OH.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Daniel P. Smith and Mary K. Sellon, *Pathway to Renewal: Practical Steps for Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 8.

has to offer the world.<sup>60</sup> A congregational that is truly being church brings people into a loving, life-giving relationship with God and others that is transformational.<sup>61</sup>

While it is true, the church is holy, catholic, apostolic and one, it has become lethargic, lifeless and limping on a life support. For the most part, the church has become a place of religious goods and services in a multicultural multiethnic society. To that end, the church stands in need of restoration as the whole earth cries out for healing and wholeness, the salvific process of making disciples of Jesus Christ and creating a biblical community to accomplish the mission of Jesus Christ is one that reflects the relational ministry of Jesus Christ and the early church. What is essential for every congregation is the desire for the Christian community to be inclusive, loving, forgiving, trusting, open to change, and unified with mutual respect and accountability for each other.

In the book, *Reclaiming The Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do about it*, John B. Cobb says, *our churches are sick*.<sup>62</sup> Cobb goes on to say, statistical projections indicate that this is a sickness unto death.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, the Christian community must find effective ways to respond to the renewal and revitalization of the church. While the church is and always has been made up of real human relationships, the church continues to live out its calling through the lives of broken people in a fragmented world that is in urgent need of fostering healing and nurturing wholeness in the congregational life of the church. Just as the body requires a

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>61</sup>Daniel P. Smith and Mary K. Sellon, *Pathway to Renewal: Practical Steps for Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 6.

<sup>62</sup>John B. Cobb, Jr., *Reclaiming the Church: Where the Mainline Church Went Wrong and What to Do About It* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

healthy system to function, so does the congregational life of the church require renewal of the mind, restoration of the body and revitalization of the spirit in order to be vitally sustainable. Meanwhile, unity of the body, mind and spirit corporately represents the holistic paradigm of the relationships that exist within the life of the church; all working together to bring salvation to all humanity. Fostering healing and nurturing wholeness in any relationship is the bridge to building a healthy vital community.

Relationships are important. Nothing is more important than understanding the interconnectedness of the whole church as a living organism, the body of Christ; the household of faith, the bride of Christ, or a community of believers who are linked together in a covenant relationship with God that is built on love, unity and fellowship with one another. Throughout the life and ministry of Jesus, he constantly called the people to repent, to have a change of heart and to return to God. Navigating through the winds of change requires dismantling old structures, disassembling old perceptions and demolishing old models of ministry. If the church is to be culturally relevant, she must let go of fear, move out of her comfort zones of the past and re-purpose the church in order to authentically honor God, self and others.

The mission of the church is to restore hope, healing and make disciples. Of course facilitating the mission of the church means participating in the mission of God, so therefore, change in the ways things have been done is necessary if healing and wholeness is to occur. The healthier the congregation, the more energy, enthusiasm and excitement they will have as they come together to appreciate each other's uniqueness and embrace each other differences as the congregation renews their love relationship that once existed.

The letter to the Ephesians 2:19 states, “Christians are joined together to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, there is one body and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is above all, and through all and in all.<sup>65</sup>

In the book, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, Darrell L. Guder says, the Christian community is a real one.<sup>66</sup> It is made up of real people, and thus it is discernible. While the church is always a real, human social organism, it is also the body of Christ, a community grafted into the life of God minus its baptism and by the action of the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup> While no two people are alike; no two congregations are alike.<sup>68</sup> If Webb Grove is to return to the central tenets of the faith community of the AME which is: *God our Parent, Christ Our Redeemer, Humankind Our Family and the Holy Spirit our Comforter*; the Christian community of faith must recapture the passion, unity and love of the First Century Church as they cultivated missional communities of love and mutual accountability towards each other. They shared their lives together; loving one another and caring for one another. Nothing can take the place of the basic foundations of the embodiment of unity, love, empowerment and transformation; shared elements that connect together relational ministry and mission. Although each individual within the church brings her or his unique gifts to

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<sup>64</sup>Bruce Metzger M. Metzger and Ronald E. Murphy, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press).

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 12.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid. 20.

<sup>68</sup>Nancy T. Ammerman, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 78.

edify and empower each other within the congregational life of the church, much has been written about the mystery of love relationships, especially marital relationships.

Reclaiming the mission of making disciples is indeed like a good marriage. In fact, both require a commitment to love one another as the community of faith is commanded to do in John 13:34. From remembering the first kiss to remembering the first date in a marriage relationship; revitalizing the logic of love within the life of a covenant faith community is critical to church renewal and revitalization of church life as romance is in a marriage relationship.

What makes any marriage worthwhile is the ability to work together holistically on common goals, strong communication, mutual commitment, trust, faith in God, love and determination to make the relationship work for better or for worst, in sickness and in health through the good and the worst of times. Marriage is a 24/7 commitment. It is a covenant between two persons and not a contractual agreement. Fred Lowery, founder of Covenant Marriage, a collaborative effort to further strengthen the institution of marriage writes in his insightful book on Covenant Marriage offers principles, power and patterns of a covenant marriage.<sup>69</sup> Lowery asserts the best of marriages require hard work, no short cuts, and no exceptions.<sup>70</sup> Lowery states, to live happily ever after with one another is a daily process that demands unselfishness and calls for unconditional love.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Fred Lowery, *Staying Together for Life: Covenant Marriage* (Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, 2002), 23.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

Additionally, Lowery suggest some marriages require more work than others, he continues by stating every marriage is to be a continual work in progress.<sup>72</sup>

M. Scott Peck, in his book, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, comments in and through community lies the salvation of the world.<sup>73</sup> Given the state of broken relationships that exist in today's society, there is a need for additional scholarly research and study on healing broken relationships, resolving conflict and renewing covenant relationships in community with God and others. The literature review described in this section represents a wide range and random selection of the resources consulted. The writer concludes that the key words in this project are: love, renewal, restoration, relationships, community, brokenness, health, healing, and wholeness. John Wilkinson in the book, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* articulates that health consists of a right relationship to God expressed in our obedience to God's will. It also consists of our worship of God's name, which leads to an expression of spiritual wholeness.<sup>74</sup> Second, Wilkinson illustrates that health is a right relationship to our selves expressed as an unselfish humility and an acceptance of personal responsibility for the state of our body, mind, and spirit.<sup>75</sup> Third, health is a right relationship to our neighbors both, domestic, social, and national, which is expressed as love and service.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace* (New York, NY: Touchstone Rockefeller Center, 1987), 17.

<sup>74</sup>John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 19.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid. 20.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid.

These result in mutual fellowship and trust and a stable society.<sup>77</sup> To engage in a conversation on healing and wholeness for the purpose of this project is to turn one's attention to restoring God as the central focus of salvation and redemption. Focusing on the worship of God consequently, brings new love which ultimately celebrates new life in the congregational life of church and society. Whenever any couple falls in love everything has a new beginning. Gary Thomas notes in the book, *Sacred Marriage*, every wedding gives birth to a new history, a new beginning.<sup>78</sup> Thomas suggests the spiritual meaning of marriage is found in maintaining that history together.<sup>79</sup>

What happens to love after the wedding, after the couple says I do and after the honeymoon? Gary Chapman, author of the best-selling *Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* Series and the director of Marriage and Family Life Consultants, Incorporated, suggest love is the most important word in the English language and the most confusing.<sup>80</sup> Both secular and religious thinkers agree that love plays a central role in life.<sup>81</sup> The Apostle Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is essentially exalted above all human feelings. From the earliest accounts of the biblical, historical, and theological community, all agree on the importance of love as it relates to church renewal and revitalization. In the early church people gathered in love with an attitude only found in Christian fellowship for the common good, on common ground, to

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage: What if God Designed Marriage To Make Us Holy More Than To Make Us Happy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 107.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing), 20.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid.

pray together, sing together, and worship together. Augustine once said that God loves all of us even if there were only one of us to love.<sup>82</sup>

This is the love for which Christians must strive and after which the church should model. “Jesus said I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”<sup>83</sup>

Looking at the reconstruction of the church through the lenses of historians, scholars, theologians to include womanist theologians, books, and periodicals, the constant dialogue about renewal and revitalization in the life of the church can be a consolation that the church is in good hands. The literature review makes a thorough investigation that congregations today are in desperate need of reconstruction and reconciliation that lead to healing and wholeness. The early church modeled a community of healthiness, wholeness and holiness. Just as the body requires a healthy system to function, so does the congregational life of the church require renewal of the mind, restoration of the body and revitalization of the spirit in order to be vitally sustainable. This unity of the body, mind and spirit corporately represents the holistic paradigm of the relationships that exist within the life of the church; all working together to bring salvation to all humanity.

In Romans 12 Paul entreat readers to be radically transformed by the renewing of the mind by the Holy Spirit. Responding to what God has done for the Christians, he encourages the community of faith to present their bodies in worship as a sacrifice to

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<sup>82</sup>Nelson M. Smith, *What Is This Thing Called Love* (Fort Worth, TX: Star Bible Publications, Inc.), 14.

<sup>83</sup>Jn 13:34-35.

God. Throughout Paul's letters there is a consistent discussion on the diversities of gifts that are used for the common good of the church. Clearly, the church is a unique community of faith where people exist beyond symbols, rituals, padded pews, beautiful carpet, and a religious rhetoric of entertainment. Health includes our relationship with God, self and others.

Since the genesis of the renewal movement, the current and future state of Church Renewal and Church Revitalization has been a constant conversation crying out for attention. Catalysts for social and spiritual transformation are increasingly open with a new mindset about the mission of the church, nature of the church coming to terms with new paradigms of the church. While there seems to be a constant struggle to embrace the emerging church in the postmodern world, the religious community appears to be more concerned with *going to church, doing church rather than being the church*. There is a serious disconnect that is causing a dilemma within the American church culture. The problem is people are stuck in tradition. Today, the church has little desire to change. The church has become silent on vital issues that matter and count. The church is silent like the Academy Award Oscar winning movie *The Artist*. *The Artist* is a 1927 French romantic silent movie that was filmed in black and white. As silent cinema movies went out and were replaced by the talking movies in color, high definition, and 3-D pictures, so has the church become silent to critical issues that call for spiritual solutions? Like the outdated silent movies went out, the church has lost its way and strayed from its God given purpose and mission of the church.

A growing number of individuals are leaving the church and God turning to alternative methods of connecting to a higher power in order find a spiritual connection.

Some are changing their names to identify with their religious tradition of Hinduism, Buddhism and Muslim while others are caught up in a spiritual crisis. They have abandoned their religious roots, upbringing in the home, church, and seemingly are consumed by the influence of today's American pagan culture. With all that being said, the Church has been the writer's greatest influence in her life outside of her parents.

While it is true, the church is holy, catholic, apostolic and one, it has become lethargic, lifeless and limping on life support. For the most part, the church has become a place of religious goods and services in a multicultural multiethnic society. Yet, it is true our world stands in need of deep restoration as the whole earth cries out for healing and wholeness. Unfortunately, the Christian community has abandoned her commitment "to love God first, self, and others," as commanded in the Shema according to Deuteronomy 6.

While the church is and always has been made up of real human relationships, the it continues to live out its calling through the lives of broken people in a fragmented world; a world that is in urgent need of fostering healing and nurturing wholeness. What the community of faith needs more than anything is to return to a Trinitarian concept of God for holistic healing to occur. When the writer talks about healing, she turns her attention to think of the church as a healing and salvation community for the abused, broken, hurting and the lost. Thus, when we think of the church as a salvation community, it is natural to include body, soul, spirit and mind. Therefore, keeping in line with the holistic meaning of health, healing, and wholeness, the Hebrew word, shalom, means wholeness and healthiness of the entire person. It is a state of complete mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing. By definition the word, healing comes from

the old English word, *hal*, which means wholeness or holiness. In the New Testament, Jesus uses different words to speak about health. They include blessedness (Markarios), life (Zoe) and wholeness (hygeis). In fact, even the term used for salvation (sozo) can be used interchangeably for healing of the body and the soul.

Since the turn of the Twentieth Century, there has been a tremendous increase in people coming to Jesus Christ. A large part of the church growth arises from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a New Reformation of empowering, equipping and enabling the whole church. One of the things that have troubled the literature review community is preaching the gospel while the church is under re-construction, repurposing the church's understanding about worship, discipleship, and evangelism. Thomas H. Troeger insightfully quotes Loren Meade in the book *Preaching While the Church is Under Reconstruction: The Visionary Role of Preachers in a Fragmented World* puts the matter boldly:

The forms and structures, the roles and relationships of the churches we have inherited were formed by paradigms that no longer work for us. We live in the memory of great ways of understanding how to be church and to be in mission. Those memories surrounds like ruins of ancient civilization. Our educational institutions and our structures of leadership and service are likewise conflicted and at war with themselves. How do we build religious institutions within which we can live out our calling to serve the world? How do we form ourselves for mission to the emerging age?<sup>84</sup>

Mead cites that our task is no less than the reinvention of the church. Meade's refreshing imagination suggests it may take several generations.

From a Womanist perspective, the writer identifies the major cause of fragmentation is the atrophy of the church's ability to sense the compelling need to make

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<sup>84</sup>Thomas H. Troeger, *Preaching While the Church is Under Reconstruction: The Visionary Role of Preachers in a Fragmented World* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 16.

God a priority in the congregational life of the church. The writer's spiritual awareness changed quite a bit since she accepted her calling to ministry back in the eighties. She has a clearer and a more in-depth understanding of God as lover, mother, father, healer, liberator, creator, sustainer and so many other metaphors too numerous to name that are inclusive, liberating, loving and empowering. Understanding who God is has helped her to discover a more meaningful perspective about God. Meanwhile, fostering healing and nurturing wholeness in any relationship are the bridge to building a healthy vital community.

Women traditionally have been seen as inferior to men in their biblical interpretations and rated as second-class citizens in church and society. The new story is the fact that women are bringing pressure to bear on all-male paradigms in great numbers.<sup>85</sup> Vashti McKenzie in her book, *Not Without a Struggle* traces the thread of female leadership in Roman, Greek, Jewish, and African cultures.<sup>86</sup> The book focuses on the historical overview of female leadership in the church.

McKenzie acknowledges women did not gain political rights and a voice in social affairs through philosophy or social reform, but rather through economics. Women used their personal wealth to build improvements such as reservoirs, roads, and aqueducts. Women in Sparta owned 40 percent of all land. Other women exercised their skills in poetry, literature, education, music, medicine, crafts, and philosophy. Women used real political power and economic power as the pathways to leadership, freedom, and equality. They used their possession to challenge social ideals and the patriarchal system. Some women gained equal status with men. The intent is to help women in general and African American women in particular, to understand that they are not accidents, freaks, flukes or mistakes in the dominion of God. It also looks at

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<sup>85</sup>Patricia Aburdene and John Naisbitt, *Megatrends for Women* (New York, NY: Villard Books, 1992), xxiv.

<sup>86</sup>Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, Inc., 1996), xvii.

the images of female leadership in the Bible as well as other ancient sources.<sup>87</sup> Women had an official role in the Roman Empire, but they were excluded from the highest religious. Whether the cults admitted only women or both men and women, they were ultimately controlled by men. Often, even in women-only cults, male leaders used cult religion to reinforce patriarchal ideals. Today, McKenzie suggests women in many religions are allowed to carry, prepare, protect, read, and decorate sacred objects and instruments of rituals. For example, women are allowed to participate fully, even in leadership roles, as worship acolytes, lay readers, or members of altar guilds that maintain the altar Paraments. Although women were considered inferior and subservient, a few emerged as leaders, making contributions to community and God's plan of salvation. In spite of societal limitations and the dim view of women's skills and talents, the Old Testament bears witness to the important role individual played in religious life. Such as Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, the wife of Isaiah, Noadiah, and Anna served as a ruling head of all Israel during the confederation period for forty years. An exception to the seclusion rule, this married woman also led as a military commander in battle (Judges 4-5).<sup>88</sup>

Yet the struggle continues for women in leadership roles in the church. In spite of subjective biases and oppressive boundaries women are writing a new chapter in history breaking all the patriarchal rules of the good old boy's network. Throughout the life and ministry of Jesus, egalitarianism was the order of the day. Jesus constantly elevated women, the marginalized, the least, the lost and the unloved. He called the people to repent, to have a change of heart, to return to God and to remember to let go of the past while moving forward to embracing the new identity in Christ. Nothing is more important than understanding the interconnectedness of the whole church as a living organism, the body of Christ; the household of faith, the bride of Christ, or a community of believers who are linked together in a covenant relationship with God that is built on love, unity

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>88</sup>Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, Inc., 1996), 12.

and fellowship with one another. The mission of the church is to restore hope, healing and make disciples. Of course facilitating the mission of the church means participating in the mission of God, so therefore, change in the ways things have been done is necessary, if healing and wholeness is to occur. The healthier the congregation is, the more energy, enthusiasm and excitement they will have as they come together to appreciate each other uniqueness and embrace each other's differences, building a marriage while falling in love all over again. The letter to the Ephesians, 2:19-22 states "Christians have access in one Spirit to the Father." Paul continues in his quote by stating,

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.<sup>89</sup>

They shared their lives together; loving one another and caring for one another. Nothing can take the place of the basic foundations of the embodiment of unity, love, empowerment and transformation; shared elements that connect together relational ministry and mission. Although each individual within the church brings her or his unique gifts to edify and empower each other within the congregational life of the church, much has been written about the mystery of love relationships, especially marital relationships. Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, author of *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* suggests how sharing a story clearly emerges in conversation with African American's is the role of Christian Education in honoring person's quest for the

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<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 323.

soul's story to be shared and for a larger story—God's Story—to inform and transform that story.<sup>90</sup> Wimberly further states Storytelling is not new.<sup>91</sup> Wimberly makes a strong argument regarding sharing stories. She goes on to say the quest for story and storytelling brings in a part of the human existence.<sup>92</sup> Also Wimberly contends humans live an evolving narrative, or story that forms from the story world around us.<sup>93</sup> Furthermore, Wimberly concludes our lives have a past, present, and a future in some place and in some circumstances.<sup>94</sup> Our lives move on. Or it can be said that human experiences take on a narrative quality as they unfold within the framework of context, time and space.<sup>95</sup> The basis for this particular holistic approach is one of personal relevance; empowerment and using the story-linking process will provide a model for renewing hope and faith from a Womanist Theological perspective.

### **Historical, Biblical, and Theoretical Resources**

While conflict, control and power struggles, violence, abuse, division, strife, and schisms are present in the life of the Webb Grove there is a need to bring healing and wholeness to people who are in need of intentional church growth and intentional conversations about growing a healthy church. In *Minding The Good Ground: A Theology of Church Renewal*, Jason Vickers notes although readers do not know much

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<sup>90</sup> Anne E. Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* Revised Edition. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

about the lives of the disciples, they did not lose sight of the story of Pentecost, the resurrection, and the significance of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh, women and men. To understand this clearly, Vickers articulates, when we stand back and review the wider narrative of the Pentecostal origins of the church, a range of activities are prominent, including tarrying, praying, welcoming and celebrating the Holy Spirit, repenting, baptizing, learning from the apostles, breaking bread together, combining and sharing resources, worshipping together, and most importantly bearing witness to the Christ crucified, resurrected and exalted.<sup>96</sup> Vickers emphasizes the importance of tarrying together in prayer as the first step on the journey to renewal.<sup>97</sup>

Suffice it to say, evangelism is the mission of the church. By definition evangelism is described as the proclamation of salvation in Christ to those who do not believe; calling individuals to respond to the gospel of Christ, declaring repentance and conversion, announcing forgiveness of sin, inviting them to become living members of the body of Christ. On the other hand, discipleship has a different connotation than evangelism. Discipleship is a process which empowers a person to grow spiritually in the awareness of Christ equipping them to examine their thoughts, words and actions. In the book *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism*, Martha Grace Reese points out in a four year evangelism research project focused on highly effective evangelism in mainline churches, the heart of evangelism emerges from the interaction of these three sets of relationships: (1) Our personal relationships with God, (2) Healthy congregational relationships, (3) Caring about people who do not have a conscious connection with

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<sup>96</sup>Jason Vickers, *Minding The Good Ground: A Theology of Church Renewal* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 35.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 47.

Christ.<sup>98</sup> The heart of evangelism is being in love with God being part of a church you love and caring about other people who do not know that faith.<sup>99</sup> Evangelism emerges from a trinity of relationships.<sup>100</sup> The author's life-long goal has been to create an ethos or community of faith where people are empowered for service and witness to all humanity, particularly the broken and estranged. Sharing a common history of death, defeat, and discouragement with Webb Grove has helped the writer to discover the importance of trusting to love again.

The writer's experience as a foster parent for the past four years has been a time of major discovery. Foster parenting allowed her the opportunity to offer love to children who were physically, emotionally, or sexually abused, unloved, abandoned or rejected. Similarly, the author's context at Webb Grove is a church where the congregation is comprised of foster families, neglected, abandoned, unloved and rejected children who have been separated from their families and placed in loving homes.

The writer has identified herself as a caring leader and her strength is the resilience to overcome adversities. By definition resilience is defined as the ability to bounce back successfully from adversities. Her strength to overcome adversities and foster love as the appropriate care or treatment for Webb Grove is a much-needed prescription to heal damaged emotions in the life of this merged congregation. Fostering collaborative partnership through small group ministries can nurture dynamic networking

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<sup>98</sup>Martha Grace Reese, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

opportunities, offer support and spiritual care to create more authentic loving relationships of community within the walls of the church.

In the book, *I Refuse to lead A Dying Church*, Paul Nixon accentuates that the common goal is to get people connected and in community with others who share common faith and common goals.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, Nixon suggests that building community is essential to a thriving community.<sup>102</sup> Choosing community over isolation leads to the healthy development of what it means to be the church.

Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures emphasize covenant relationship in community.<sup>103</sup> In the book *The Shape of Zion : Leadership and Life in Black Churches*, Michael I. N. Dash and Christine D. Chapman reflect on relationships and discern ways that God is working in our lives, the claims that God is making upon us, and the response that we are offering in faithfulness and obedience.<sup>104</sup> Dash and Chapman both concur that the Bible is a book about relationships between God and humankind and others. Dash and Chapman goes on to say it is in communion with one another that we not only come face to face with the biblical message, but also discover our responsibility to keep covenant with God and others in community.<sup>105</sup> By definition the church is the called out community (*ecclesia*). Although the church is a

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<sup>101</sup>Paul Nixon, *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press 2006), 48.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>104</sup>Michael I. N. Dash and Christine D. Chapman, *The Shape of Zion: Leadership and Life in Black Churches* (Cleveland: OH, The Pilgrim Press, 2003,) 23.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*

human organism where people gather to fellowship, worship, and break bread together, Dash and Chapman contend it is more than what human beings do.<sup>106</sup>

According to Dash, a Christian community is a gathered community of faith with a story. For this reason, God calls the church into community. Dash affirms that life in the congregation is the story of persons who are engaged together in a journey and adventurer with God and under the guidance of God's Spirit's story of relationship and interaction.<sup>107</sup>

Above all, every couple hopes that they will live happily ever after with a white picket fence dream. "So they are no longer two but one, What God hath joined together let no man separate" (Mt 19:6; Mk 10:9), can be heard in most Christian tradition wedding ceremonies sealing the wedding vows with the aforementioned affirmation of commitment in marriage.

Dr. Robin L. Smith, author, ordained minister and licensed psychologist offers practical advice in the *Lies at the Altar: The Truth about Great Marriages* comments one of every two marriages does not sustain itself until physical death.<sup>108</sup> Smith declares, many other couples die emotionally, spiritually, sexually and sensually within the marriage, but they feel obliged to honor their vows to stay until the bitter end.<sup>109</sup>

In the book, *Swapping Housewives: Rachel & Jacob & Leah*, Vashti Murphy McKenzie surveys the ancient mayhem of Jacob to Rachel and Leah to their servants

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<sup>106</sup>Michael I. N. Dash and Christine D. Chapman, *The Shape of Zion: Leadership and Life in Black Churches* (Cleveland: OH, The Pilgrim Press, 2003).

<sup>107</sup>Ibid.

<sup>108</sup>Robin L. Smith, *Lies At The Altar: The Truth About Great Marriages* (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2006), 147.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 148.

Bilhah and Zilpah as she parallels them with 21<sup>st</sup> century relationships.<sup>110</sup> McKenzie points out, in today's American culture; the institution of marriage is on life support.<sup>111</sup> McKenzie goes on to note statically, there are just as many couples that are cohabitating as there as there are couples that are getting married.<sup>112</sup> To many people McKenzie says, marriage is a sacred covenant commitment that becomes a shared adventure with Jesus Christ. McKenzie emphasizes millions of couples are navigating their relationships from the shark infested waters of marital bliss to calm waters and balmy temperatures.<sup>113</sup> Of course, to some, marriage has been reduced to a contract with limited term options.<sup>114</sup> McKenzie asserts, living together is equated as trial marriages and starter wives—the current terms that have entered into the cultural vernacular.<sup>115</sup> Vashti Murphy McKenzie concludes by stating marriage has been reduced to a contract with limited term options.

In the book written by Donald Hilliard Jr., *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, Hilliard strongly declares the basic commission of the church is universal, to make disciples of all nations and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the specific approach to fulfilling that commission as it varies from one local church body to the next.<sup>116</sup> Hilliard says the reason for this is no two local church

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<sup>110</sup>Vashti Murphy McKenzie, *Swapping Housewives: Rachel & Jacob & Leah* (Cleveland: OH, 2007), vii.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Donald Hilliard, Jr., *Church Growth from an African American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 7.

fellowships are exactly alike, and Jesus equips each church for its specific assignment.<sup>117</sup>

Hilliard goes on to ask the question, do the people love God, or have they lost their first love?<sup>118</sup> Today's church must empower her members. In the book, *An 8-Track Church in a CD World: The Modern Church in a Postmodern World*, author Robert N. Nash, Jr. comments that his book has sounded a warning that God is birthing a new church.<sup>119</sup>

Nash goes on to say, traditional American churches no longer have a choice. Furthermore, Nash states change must occur, for death is inevitable. In addition to the aforementioned, Nash adds, the old church will slowly be laid to rest, but its death will make way for the new church that will emerge in its place. Its bricks and boards will be disassembled. And a new church will be gradually born. The bricks that divided the church from the world will be buried deep in the ground. Nash believes that a new roof will be laid over a church that has no walls. The old church will pass away, and the new church will be born in its place. A spiritual revolution is quietly taking place just outside of the church walls.<sup>120</sup>

For the most part, people are treating their relationship with God like taking off their dirty socks. They dabble from church to church with only a form of godliness but they deny the power of God. Today the communal faith is disintegrating. Nash says new religions have captured the faith loyalties of Americans.<sup>121</sup> Nash is convinced a spiritual birth cannot occur until old spiritual forms that have lost their vigor have been buried deep in the earth. He suggests that a local church begin the process of spiritual

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>Donald Hilliard, Jr. *Church Growth from an African American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 84.

<sup>119</sup>Robert N. Nash, Jr., *An 8-Track Church in a CD World: The Modern Church in the Postmodern World* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1997), 116.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

transformation by asking its membership to assess its spirituality by asking the following questions:

- Does the church meet your spiritual needs? Why or why not?
- How spiritually meaningful are the worship Services and Wednesday evening prayer service?
- What is the most spiritually meaningful event you have experienced in the past year?
- Why was it meaningful?
- How can the church cultivate more meaningful spiritual experiences for you in the coming year?
- What do you believe to be your own spiritual inadequacies?
- How can the church help?<sup>122</sup>

Such introspection according to Nash allows for a spiritual evaluation of the congregation. It assesses the strengths and weaknesses of worship, prayer, and other spiritual forms that are essential to a spiritually healthy congregation. Now the Church must begin to assess its worship services and other structures to begin to recapture spiritual vitality. Nash finds hope to believe that it's a new day when the church must open itself to the move of the Holy Spirit.

Like Robert N. Nash, Jr., Loren Mead agrees that the American church must face three startling new realities.

- We can no longer assume that everyone in the United States is a Christian.
- The local community and the local church are no longer synonymous with each other.

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<sup>122</sup>Ibid.

- The front door of the church is once again a doorway to missions much as it was in the early church.<sup>123</sup>

At the “January, 2011, Doctoral of Ministry, Plenary Session, held at United Theological Seminary, Floyd Flake, Co-author of *Nine Action Steps for Achieving Your Dreams* has a very good approach to finding one’s best self in order to getting people to think differently.<sup>124</sup> Flake’s five models of leadership include a very healthy and successful approach to bringing about change in the community where he and his wife Elaine McCollins Flake have served for the past thirty-one years. The five models of leadership are listed as follows: (1) The Transitional Leadership; (2) Transactional Leadership; (3) Transparency in Leadership; (4) Transcendence in Leadership; and finally, (5) The Transformational Leadership approach.

Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses yet for the most part all five of them offer a very positive solution to creating a positive transformational effect in the life of any organization.<sup>125</sup> In the Transitional Leadership approach according to Flake one must be willing to die for the vision, take risk in developing new leaders, goals and objectives must be clear and concise and be sensitive to the tradition of the church or organization.<sup>126</sup> Transactional Leadership gets the people to buy into the vision; knowing when to move from the discussion point to the decision point and some point along the way the leader should know how to delegate. In the Transparency in Leadership approach Flake’s analogy of Moses standing on the mountain top giving a command or delegating

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<sup>123</sup>Robert N. Nash, Jr., *An 8-Track Church in a CD World: The Modern Church in the Postmodern World* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1997), 67.

<sup>124</sup>Floyd Flake, Plenary, Lecture, Intensive, Dayton, Ohio, United Theological Seminary, January, 2011.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*

responsibility has long come and gone and is by far a very ineffective way of getting things done. Flake stated, “*Telling people what to do is over.*” He goes on to say that it is very vital and healthy for information to flow back and forth from the people to the leader as a good means of communicating the vision effectively. A necessary ingredient in the Transparency Leadership approach is the ability to function with integrity. Choosing people that are trustworthy and choosing people who understand the vision and also selecting people who have backbone; real leaders who are not afraid to stand up. Flake pointed out the most aggressive leadership approach was Transformational Leadership. This style of leader makes an aggressive shift by asking the people, *What are you going to do next?* Transformational Leadership focuses on the goals, identifies the problems and the solutions to the problems, and then implements solutions to the problems. He/she matches skill sets, chooses the right people and he/she has the gift of leadership to move people beyond where they are.

Reggie McNeal author of *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* and Missional Leadership Specialist for Leadership Network of Dallas, Texas has written a timely, transformational church leadership manuscript redefining the Missional Church for the twenty-first century that will ultimately cause church leaders and congregations to make a shift in understanding the *Missional Renaissance* of the ecclesia that includes very practical ideas to move the church from three significant missional shifts (1) an internal to an external focused ministry; (2) from running programs and ministries to developing people as the churches operative foci; (3) from church-based leadership to community interacting leadership.

While there is a culturally transformational missional move in the Kingdom of God that is changing the church's role in the world and the way congregations are doing church, McNeal redefines what the missional church is rather than putting emphasis on what the church does.<sup>127</sup> First and foremost missional church is not doing church as usual. There is a missional shift in the Kingdom of God; shifting from program development to people development.

The author also states when the church makes a radical shift in how the church thinks and behaves, then and only then will the church experience a Missional Renaissance changing the scorecard of the church.<sup>128</sup> Reggie McNeal speaks truth to power as he effortlessly says, "Churches are doing some *Un-churchy* things. Transitioning from *un-churchy things* to blessing and serving the needs of the communities where the churches are located is how churches are arriving at the changing the scorecard of the being the church. McNeal suggest it is very vital to breathe new life into the church in order to revolutionize and revitalize the church. And if the truth be told, changing the scorecard of the church involves producing people development verses the delivery of a ministry service by replacing church programs with community service inclusive of moving from Church based to Kingdom-based leadership objectives according to McNeal appears to be the author's principal arguments in his book.<sup>129</sup> The missional church shift's agenda focuses on people outside the church pursuing the development of the people with opportunities to enhance the quality of life rather making

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<sup>127</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), xiv

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 15.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

church growth and development of utmost importance raising the awareness to the church's response in a time of a manifestation in the Kingdom of God.<sup>130</sup> Overall, McNeal encourages an approach to becoming actively involved in God's redemptive mission living out the mission of God outside the churches by going out into the world.

According to the most recent Pew research study, cohabitation is an increasingly prevalent lifestyle in the United States of America.<sup>131</sup> As the sacrament of marriage continues to decline more and more couples are living together as unmarried partners. The share of 30-44 year olds living as unmarried couples has more than doubled since the 1990's.<sup>132</sup> In the Pew Research Study, 44 percent of all adults (and more than half of all adults ages 30-49) say they have cohabitated at some point and time in their lives. However, given the disquieting statistics in the National Marriage Project it is imperative to focus on building healthy sustainable relationships. In the researcher's opinion, for too long, the church has served as a place for wedding ceremonies based on a couple's desire to have a church wedding. Living together as a couple does not allow persons to enter into a promise of commitment to live together until death. Christian marriage is more than a ceremony or cohabitating. Indeed, it is a commitment between two people to Jesus Christ and to reach other, as they understand what it takes to strengthen their relationship before they say the words, "*I do*" and *till death do us part*."

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., 17

<sup>131</sup>Pew Research Study <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org> (accessed July 30, 2012).

<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

Vashti Murphy McKenzie in her book, swapping Housewives contend covenant relationships are relationships in which love and commitment are two vital ingredients.<sup>133</sup> More importantly, she adds the commitment to each other is sustained with God supplying the glue<sup>134</sup> McKenzie says according to the National Marriage Project the state of marriage unions has changed dramatically since 1960. She states the number of African American men married in 1960 was 69 percent, and women, 59 percent. In a recent survey according to the National Marriage Project study and the Institute for American Values Pew Research Study:

*The State of our Union Marriage in America 2010: When Marriage Disappears the New Middle America* monitored the current health of marriage and the family in America. Given the data collected from the research study the Executive Summary of the National Marriage Project in Middle America, the study reported marriage is in trouble. Accordingly, the research suggested among the affluent marriage is stable and appears to be getting even stronger. Among the poor, marriage continues to be fragile and weak. But the newest and perhaps most consequential marriage trend of our time concerns the broad center of our society, where marriage that iconic middle-class institution is foundering. *When Marriage Disappears* argues Middle Americans with a high school but not college degree rates of non-marital childbearing and divorce are rising even as marital happiness is failing. Data from the National Survey of Family Growth showed unlike yesterday's college graduates or high school graduates are less likely to get married and stay happily married. With the current problems of economic stress, partner conflict, single parenting, troubled children marriage in Middle American is in trouble. The research showed the percentage of children who grow up in fragile typically fatherless has grown enormously over the past five decades. This is mainly due to increases in divorce, non-marital childbearing and unmarried cohabitation. Sixty nine percent high school boys to sixty three percent high school girls who agreed or mostly agreed with this statement: *It is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married in*

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<sup>133</sup>Vashti Murphy Mckenzie, *Swapping Housewives: Rachel & Jacob & Leah* (Cleveland: OH, 2007), xi.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., Xii.

*order to find out whether they really get along.* Given the current trends cohabitation is more common among those who are less religious than their peers, those who have been divorced and those who have experience parental divorce, fatherlessness, or high levels of marital discord during childhood. A growing percentage of co-habiting-couple households, now over forty percent, contain children. The belief that living together before marriage is a useful way to find out *whether you really get along* and thus avoid a bad marriage and eventual a divorce. These issues are a cause for concern in the African American context. To address matters in marriage relationships, the Federal Government began the Healthy Marriage Initiative to help couples sustain a healthy marriage.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup>Pew Research Study <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org> (accessed July 30, 2012).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain  
(Ps 127:1).

Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another  
(Prv 27:17).

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their  
toil, For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who  
is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again if two  
lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone?  
And though one might prevail against another, to will stand one. A  
threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecc 4:9-12).

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in  
unity (Ps133:1).

Can two walk together without agreeing on the direction?  
(Am 3:3).

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible draws a link between the everlasting  
covenant between God's chosen people and the marriage covenant between husband and  
wife? Marriage and family therapist, counselors and Christian bookstores and experts in  
the field of marriage relations have discovered the covenant is the only adequate  
foundation on which a lasting and fulfilling marriage can be built. What happens when  
the honeymoon is over? The writer is convinced that every couple and every church  
merger needs a clear understanding of marriage as a covenant relationship. Perhaps Webb

Grove lost that loving feeling when they fell out of love with each other. Only when two individuals are committed to each other can love last for a lifetime.

The Book of Hosea tells of one of the great love stories in the Bible. Seven hundred years before the birth of Christ, God commanded the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute named Gomer. Following the marriage, Gomer gave birth to three children, but Hosea was hurt because he was not the father of any of the children. Gomer left Hosea and continued her lifestyle of a prostitute. Hosea could have abandoned Gomer but instead he redeems Gomer and chooses her to be his wife again. Hosea 3:1 say, “The Lord said to me again, who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”<sup>1</sup>

Using marriage as a model is helpful in understanding the nature of the salvation covenant with God through Jesus Christ. Jeremiah 31:34 say, “the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah” (Jer 31:31). In the biblical model of marriage, the husband symbolizes God and the wife God’s people.

Chapter Three discusses the biblical, theological, and historical underpinnings that give purpose to this project as the writer explores the significance of reclaiming the mission of making disciples in a healthy covenant Christian community from a womanist hermeneutical perspective. The problem identified by the writer is the spirit of death, defeat, and discouragement as a result of a congregational merger, relocation, and the

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<sup>1</sup>Hos 3:1.

building of a new sanctuary.<sup>2</sup> Two declining congregations fell out of love with each other. Consequently, once the honeymoon ended, the congregation experienced a loss of spiritual vitality in worship, lost her missional focus to make disciples, and a decline in membership occurred.<sup>3</sup> Jim Tomberlin and Warren provide valuable advice about the healthy marriage of a church merger.<sup>4</sup> Tomberlin and Bird suggests in the book, *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work*, advocate that marriage mergers occur when two churches, both of which are strong or growing, realign with each other under a united vision and new leadership configuration. Tomberlin and Bird goes on to say, people entering marriages bring both strengths and liabilities, a lot like a lot of human marriages, churches coming together may have some difficulties, but they can work through them. Building a Christian marriage is not easy.

In the book, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith*, Bill Hull asserts that one of the ironies of the church is that a healthy one becomes the most powerful and dynamic force for good on the planet; on the other hand, a sick church is one of the ugliest sights known to man.<sup>5</sup> Hull asserts the first church had strikingly simple priorities and practices.<sup>6</sup> Twice in Acts Chapter 2 the passage mentions the breaking of bread. Moreover, the Christians in the early church community ate, sang, cried, played and prayed together. Often, the people shared in

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<sup>2</sup>Jim Tomberlin and Warren Bird, *Better Together: Making Church Mergers Work* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 29.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading the Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 68, 69.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 68.

*koinonia* fellowship. This fellowship according to Bill Hull was more than superficial fellowship.<sup>7</sup> The early church devoted themselves to fellowship (Acts: 2:42). With that in mind, the word for fellowship is *koinonia*; it means to have in common or to share in community.

The writer of this project has been intentional about integrating themes of healing and wholeness in worship, Bible Study, sermons, focus groups and by creating communities of small group ministries within Webb Grove. In the New Testament one cannot neglect the importance of healing and wholeness in Jesus' ministry.

The writer also explores biblical concepts for healing and wholeness from a biblical womanist perspective. While the writer has a clear understanding of health, healing and wholeness in community, the Bible informs the life of all Christian communities. From the earliest days of Church history, the Christian community has used the Bible to understand the human experience by scripture, reason, and tradition. Co-authors William W. Klein, Craig L. Bloomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. in the book, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, argue that the rich heritage influences today's Christians in the ways they use the Bible for individual and corporate purposes, such as:

1. A text for preaching or teaching
2. A source for information and understanding life
3. A guide for worship
4. A wellspring to formulate Christian liturgy

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 69.

5. A primary source for the formulation of theology
6. A guide for pastoral care
7. The sustenance for spiritual formation in the Christian life
8. Literature for aesthetic enjoyment<sup>8</sup>

A quote was taken from Dr. Donnell Moore's, April 26-28 2012 Peer Session lecture on Evangelism, Stewardship and Discipleship-Making, "the church has left the building," clearly explains the writer's contextual concern for discipleship, evangelism, and the urgency for a healthy Christian community.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, Dr. Moore states in most of our churches we have an inadequate approach to evangelism.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that the reason the church is impotent is because the church has not been engaged in discipleship.<sup>11</sup> Too many people are trying to grow a church rather than disciple them into the church. The question the church must wrestle with is: "what kind of disciples are we making if the church is not modeling Christ?" Moore goes on to remind readers that the word evangelism is never mentioned in the Bible.<sup>12</sup> However, evangelism is the process by which every Christian should be compelled to share the gospel.<sup>13</sup> To that end, discipleship is a commitment to one another

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<sup>8</sup>William W. Klein, Craig L. Bloomberg and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Introduction in *Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1993), 377-399.

<sup>9</sup>Lecture Notes from April 26-28 2012 Peer Session by Dr. Donnell Moore, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

as pastoral care can be given to the entire body. From the writer's observation in the ministry context at Webb Grove, whenever a congregation lacks pastoral care, commitment, loyalty, love that is unconditional, an attitude of forgiveness, trust and mutual accountability, it is difficult to live, work, and worship together as a healthy church family. An important aspect of this project is exploring the power of the covenant community in congregational connectedness in culture, community, conflict, and identity.

David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert B. Sloan in the book, *Foundations for Biblical Interpretations: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources*, quote a passage from *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* regarding culture. In the aforementioned text, Bruce J. Malina emphasizes culture may be understood as the shared ideas, values, practices, and assumptions which regulate and protect the collective life of a group or society.<sup>14</sup> It separates the boundaries among cliques within the church, gatekeepers and it sets boundaries for the insiders and outsiders. Malina notes culture is a map of the world of social relations by which obligation, and expectation, privilege and respect, honor, and shame may be assigned.<sup>15</sup> Also, Malina adds, individuals may or may not be aware of the influence of culture upon his or her behavior.<sup>16</sup> Time and time again pastoral care as discipleship is misunderstood. Discipleship clarifies the goal of the Christian community as pastoral care is sometimes only associated with the pastor. On the one hand the writer

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<sup>14</sup>David S. Dockery, Kenneth A. Matthews, and Robert S. Sloan, *Foundations For Biblical Interpretations: A Complete Library of Tools and Resources* (Nashville, TN: Broad and Holman Publishers, 1994), 489.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

explores how the congregation as a whole can disciple each other as they offer pastoral care to one another. It is each member's responsibility in the congregational life of the church to implement discipleship according to the Great Commission as outlined in the Matthew 28: 19-20.

### **A Womanist Biblical Perspective**

Ruth provides the writer with a model of healing and wholeness from a womanist biblical perspective on the true meaning of how to make love relationships last for a lifetime. The first six verses provide the introduction to the book and serve also to set the stage for an everlasting love and covenant relationship for Ruth and Boaz. The opening words, "in the days that the Judges judged," places the events to be told in a particular period of ancient Israel's history before the tribes had coalesced into a kind of unity and while there was reoccurring hostility from outside forces. The biblical narrative draws the reader's attention to Orpah and Ruth's return to Moab, their home country. Naomi urges her daughters-in-law four times to return (verses 8, 11, and 12 and again in verse 15 to go back home. However, Ruth uses the word, "Entreat me not to leave you" to turn from following you in a way to connote a sense of belonging, the place where there is life in community. The word return can also be used biblically to mean people returning to God.

Look, said Naomi, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her. But Ruth replied don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.

May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.<sup>17</sup>

Many know these words of commitment and covenant in Ruth 1:15-17; although couples may not know the words of the text by memory, more times than couples can count, the bride and the groom have repeated the familiar covenant of love in Ruth 1:15-17 in a wedding ceremony and indeed this text has become a part of several wedding context. Ironically, it was Ruth, a Moabite that God used as a model of solidarity, survival, and wholeness and an opportunity for inclusion in the lineage of Jesus Christ despite her circumstances. Although the plan to keep Ruth on the margins of society failed, it was customary according to Israelite law and custom for a kinsman redeemer to marry a widow or find someone to marry Ruth. However, at the conclusion of the story Boaz marries Ruth, develops an unselfish love for each other, and unites as one.

In addition to the aforementioned, according to ancient Israelite tradition, sons were to inherit land—not daughters. The unity of Ruth and Naomi is essential to understanding the ecclesiology with in the context of Webb Grove, the embodiment of God's covenant with Israel. Two people united together by a covenantal agreement. What does Ruth, Naomi and Boaz's narrative say about wholeness; spiritual, mental and emotional health and what it means to take on the mind of a disciple? Their strong bond of friendship between Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz provide an excellent paradigm of a loving mother/daughter-in-law relationship and a holistic covenant relationship as a servant of Jesus Christ put on earth to live out the Great Commission. Transition was necessary in order for transformation to occur in the life of Ruth. While resistance to change or any

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<sup>17</sup>Ru 1:16-17.

means of transition can cause distrust, discomfort, and conflict, it can be an opportunity to process one's healing as he or she moves into a new place to build new relationships.

Although the writer wrestles with similar issues as Ruth and Naomi's life of tragedy, death, defeat and discouragement, loss, control, dominance, and survival, the writer links the story of Ruth with the tragedy of death and loss she experiences in the death of her husband prior to remarrying her soul mate. The writer became interested in the Book of Ruth because her spiritual autobiography connects with Ruth's grief, mourning and forgiveness. In the ancient love story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz, the writer reflects on how the scriptures bring healing and wholeness to the context at Webb Grove.

The passage in the book of Ruth Chapter 1:1-22, describes the unity between Naomi and Ruth. In this narrative we are introduced to Ruth and Boaz as a prototype of the church, the bride and the bridegroom. It is clear from the way the story is recounted that Ruth is a foreigner in a patriarchal society where having a husband and children are of great value. It is unique in the Hebrew Bible and in the writer's own context because it portrays a strong bond between a widowed mother-in-law and her daughter-in-laws. Ruth and Naomi's strong attachment or bond models a similar relationship with the writers' mentors and marriage to her husband. Ruth and Naomi's biblical story mirror the life and ministry context of the writer; a victimization of tragedy, violence and cultural oppression.

The story would have readers to know Naomi moved from Bethlehem in Judah to the foreign country of Moab because of a famine. According to biblical history, Ruth's cultural oppression tripled when she relocated to Bethlehem with Naomi, for there she

was not only a widow who was without children but a foreigner.<sup>18</sup>

The Book of Ruth presents the story of a foreigner who refused to succumb to the societal definitions of womanhood in her time. From a womanist hermeneutical interpretation, Ruth serves a model of healing and wholeness as she emerges as an overcomer, and a survivor, despite the many adversities she overcomes. In ancient Patriarchal societies, women depended on male relatives for protection and care. Unfortunately, widows were usually ignored and destitute.

The writer surveys the life of Ruth with her mother-in-law Naomi who experiences a series of repeated tragedies and losses. At first sight, the story moves from sorrow to joy, emptiness to fullness, and brokenness to wholeness basically through the story of three women, Ruth and Orpah both Moabite women and Naomi an Israelite woman who are challenged to leave Moab, a land of famine and journey to Bethlehem.<sup>19</sup> Through bereavement and barrenness it appeared as though Israel was without a future.<sup>20</sup> But the death of two sons at the beginning of the story of Ruth offsets the ending of the story by a son whose birth holds promise not only for the family but for a nation.<sup>21</sup> The entire narrative story of Ruth is about divine intervention in human relationships.

The repetition of the words *return*, *turn back*, and *go back* indicates how powerful the key verse in Ruth 1:8 underscores the faithfulness and steadfast love that bind

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<sup>18</sup>Tokunboh Adeyemo, *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi, Kenya: Word Alive Publishers, 2006), 321.

<sup>19</sup>John Barton and John Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary, The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Great Clarendon, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

families together.<sup>22</sup> Naomi, Ruth and Boaz serve as models of faithful commitment to the God of Israel.<sup>23</sup> Ruth's commitment to Naomi is suggestive of marriage vows and of covenant making in relationships.<sup>24</sup>

The story of Ruth underscores the loyalty and fidelity that bind the family together.<sup>25</sup> The mysterious ways of God is revealed in four chapters and ninety-four verses as an important part of this redemptive story, which illustrates to the reader how God is continuously at work in the lives of Naomi, Ruth, Orpah, and Boaz. Ruth chapter 1:1 places the account of the book in the period of when judges ruled Israel, or about 1375-1050 B. C. During this time most of the judges did not rule over all of Israel. Yet throughout history, it was customary for families to relocate to a new community because of job or economic circumstances.

The principle characters are Ruth, Orpah, Naomi, and Boaz. Naomi is an Israelite woman and Ruth is a Moabite daughter-in-law. In verses 1 and 2 we learn that a family from Bethlehem in Judah did so. Elimelech, the husband, and his wife Naomi had two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. The name of the families of hometown, Bethlehem, means *House of Bread*, there was a famine in the land that made survival difficult to endure. Sometime after Elimelech and Naomi's arrival in Moab, tragedy struck. Elimelech's death left Naomi dependent on her two sons (Ru 1:3). Apparently, Mahlon, and Kilion liked Moab well enough to marry and settle down. (Ru 1:4). These marriages would have

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Bruce Metzger M. Metzger and Ronald E. Murphy, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>24</sup>John Barton and John Muddiman, *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (Great Clarendon, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

been frowned upon by the orthodox Israelites, for whom Moab long represented temptation, immorality, and idolatry. For instance, during the Israelites wandering in the wilderness, their men had been easily seduced by Moabite women (Nu 25:1-5). During the third and second B. C. E., the religion of the Moabites was similar to that of their neighbors, the Canaanites. Overtime, the two nations practices became clear-cut. Chemosh was the Moabites' national god, and they were known as *the people of Chemosh*. The national god of the Moabites was believed to be a god of war who led God's people to victory. Ten years later Naomi's family moved to Moab, tragedy struck again.

From the passages in Ruth 1:5, we learn the names of Naomi's sons indicating that they were weak perhaps from birth. Mahlon means *weak, sick or discouraged*, and Kilion means failing or defeat. Ruth and Orpah were probably widowed soon after their weddings. After the death of *Mahlon* and *Kilion*, all three women were left without resources to survive. Nevertheless, the pendulum swings as the intimate relationship of Ruth the Moabite and Boaz with its promise of a glorious future for Israel under David redeems the apostasy and degradation of God's chosen people.<sup>26</sup> Although the women were not in covenant line to receive the special blessing, God remembered them as God's love followed women throughout the ancient biblical world even as it follows women today.

A biblical womanist perspective is extremely important for self-reliant women who have worked to keep the family unit together. Reclaiming the mission of discipleship

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

is all about taking care of the sheep while the sheep care for each other. What does care look like from a womanist biblical perspective? The writer advocates (C.A.R.E): communicating, advocating, reclaiming, and empowering individuals to disciple each other with love.

In order for the church to reclaim the mission of making disciples and reclaiming spiritual vitality in the church, the writer explores health and wholeness in the congregational body as she looks to the Great Commission where Jesus commands the disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20).

Frank A. Thomas in the book *Spiritual Maturity: Preserving Congregational Health and Balance* quotes Edwin H. Friedman from his classic work, *Generations to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, upholding that congregational leadership can be a healing modality.<sup>27</sup> The writer also looks at how John Wesley devoted himself to biblical principles, and spiritual disciplines such as prayer, attentiveness to the Word of God, Bible study, and fasting. In this project, the church in Ephesus has a lot in common with Webb Grove. Like the church in Ephesus, Webb Grove was a hard working church; patient in their labor and loved God and yet, all of this was not enough to counterbalance losing their passion for God.

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<sup>27</sup>Frank A. Thomas, *Spiritual Maturity: Preserving Congregational Health and Balance* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 2.

Revelation 2:2-7 describes a church that abandoned their love for one another. In Revelation 2:4 John rebukes the congregation at Ephesus: *You have left your first love.*

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance. I know that you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have grown weary. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove my lampstand from its place, unless you repent. Yet this is to your credit: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate? Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Ephesus was the principal city of Asia Minor, with a population of about 250,000.

It was wealthy and cosmopolitan. Standing on a platform measuring more than one hundred thousand square feet was the temple that consisted of one hundred columns. Trade passed through land and water. Ephesus could also boast of having one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; the Temple of Diana or Artemis, as she was called by the Greek community, the great mother goddess. From all parts of the world people came to view and to worship in the great temple. It is to this Church at Ephesus that John is writing the letter addressed to the Church at Ephesus. The challenge to the church at Ephesus is to overcome defeat, death and discouragement. It appears there is a thin line between the faithfulness and the faithless. Obviously, the people were too close to that line. The Church in Ephesus was warned that if they do not repent and return to Jesus Christ, the Son of Man will return and remove their lampstand. In other words, without love they cannot be a part of the church.

The biblical historical record shows the church in Ephesus to be unhealthy and prototypical in their lack of love for God and the entire Ephesian community. The Church

at Ephesus is a prime example of how a congregation can lose sight of its primary purpose of loving God and loving its neighbor. Congregations easily become distracted and lose their focus on God. Upon closer examination, the writer discovered the Church at Ephesus displayed similar conduct/attitudes as Webb Grove. In Revelation 2:4, John rebukes the congregation at Ephesus by telling them to remember, repent and return to God. John succinctly states to the Church at Ephesus, *you have left your first love*. The love for Christ had grown cold; also the love they used to have for the body of Christ was consumed with false teachers. The church at Ephesus lost her focus and fell out of love with God. Congregational remembering in the life of the congregation was most meaningful to recalling what God had done for them and how God had responded in love to them.

The problem can also found in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah 2:1-8 as Israel forsakes God.

The word of the Lord came to me: Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: This is what the Lord says: I remember the devotion if your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them, declares the Lord. Hear the word of the Lord, you descendants of Jacob, all you clans of Israel. This is what thus the Lord says: What fault did your ancestors find in me that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They did not ask where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land where no one travels and no one lives? I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. The priests did not ask where is the Lord? Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.

The Bible clearly proves God is relational. Numerous marriage relationships originate in the Bible, such as, Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Jacob and Rachel and Leah, Isaac and Rebecca, Moses and Zipporah, Zacharias and Elizabeth, and Priscilla and Aquila. Thus, Christ and the Church serve as the biblical model of a healthy marriage.

In Romans 12:4-5 and 1 Corinthians 12:12, Paul describes the church, the body of Christ, as one entity made up of individual parts. It is a union that embraces individual uniqueness. This same concept of diversity in oneness is the divine mystery that brings healing wholeness to Christian marriages. Oneness in marriage does not mean one has to lose his or her identity. The biblical image of two becoming one strengthens each other. Paul writes to the church at Philippi: Make your joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

In the Christian scriptures, *covenant* is a fundamental theological concept, especially in the biblical promise *I will be your God and you shall be my people* (Jer 31:33, Gn 17:7, Lv 26:12, Dt 29:10-13, Ez 37:27, Ru 1:16 -18). In fact, the Bible is a covenant book and God's people are covenant people. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham and his descendants. In the New Testament, the Lord's Supper, with the eating of the broken bread (representing the body of Christ) and the drinking of the juice (representing the blood of Jesus Christ), both serve as a reminder of one's covenant of salvation. What is a covenant?

Covenant in the Bible represents a commitment between two or more parties. By definition covenant is a binding contract between two parties that usually involves

promises and obligations.<sup>28</sup> In the Bible the word covenant is used to describe an agreement between God and his people, but it can also refer to one nation and another, a covenant was a treaty.<sup>29</sup> A covenant is about relationships. The word *covenant* in the Old Testament is associated with Israel and the church in the blessing of life together for better or worse, in sickness and health until death.

The Hebrew word *berith* is used over 280 times in the Old Testament to describe treaties, alliances, or leagues between individuals.<sup>30</sup> It is used to describe a constitution between a ruler and one's subjects.<sup>31</sup> *Berith* is used of a relationship between God and God's covenant people, Israel. The themes of *turn back, go back, return, repentance, remember, and steadfast love called hesed*, is translated loving kindness or mercy as the concepts of covenant.<sup>32</sup>

This helps the reader to understand one's relationship with God. *Yahweh*, the self-existent God, who initiates and keeps covenant with humankind.<sup>33</sup> The Greek word *diatheke* occurs thirty-three times in the New Testament.<sup>34</sup> The Greek word for covenant is *syntheke*, however, the prefix *syn* means *together with*. A covenant is relational. Consequently, the Church is comprised of those who express their faith through

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<sup>28</sup>Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 194.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*

obedience to the covenant.<sup>35</sup> While it is contrary to God's nature to break covenant, throughout biblical history relationship with God is one of broken covenants.<sup>36</sup>

The nature of the biblical *berith* as a statement of God's intentions is seen in each of the four major covenants, Abrahamic, Davidic, Mosaic, and the New Covenant.<sup>37</sup> In Ephesians 2:12, Paul reminds the Gentiles of their identity before they knew Christ. They were foreigners (strangers) to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. In verse 13 says, "You who once were far away have been brought near through the blood covenant of Christ."<sup>38</sup>

From Genesis to Revelation the Bible draws a clear link between the everlasting covenant between God and God's people and the marriage covenant between husband and wife. Marriage relationships are designed to mirror God's marriage to Israel and Christ's marriage to the church.

According to God in the biblical model of marriage, the husband symbolizes the groom (God) and wife, the bride (God's people), the church. The husband taking the woman to be his wife is seen as a prototype of saving the bride from her state of brokenness. Marriage is not just about uniting with a partner, but it is leaving one's family and cleaving together as one. Genesis 2:24 is one of the most critical verses in the Bible. "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Eph 2:12-13.

they shall become one flesh.”<sup>39</sup> Genesis 2:18 says, “Then the Lord God said it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a partner.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Biblical Prescription for Wholeness**

In Jeremiah 3, God pleaded with unfaithful Israel to return to Him, “For I am married to you (Jer 3:14). In Revelation 19:7, the return of Christ is referred to like this, “The marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.”<sup>41</sup> God used the imagery of marriage to describe God’s relationship with God’s people because that was the best model of God’s bond to the church and humanity.

In John 15:5, one of the most vivid examples of unity is John’s analogy of a branch and a vine that is attached to Christ. “I am the vine, you are the branches; those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>42</sup>

In the Old Testament, Israel is brought out of bondage from Egypt (Ex 14-15; Deut 32:6). At Mount Sinai the congregation comes into being as a covenant community in response to God’s salvation. Exodus creates a delivered people, but it is in the covenant at Sinai that Israel becomes an organized congregation. In the New Testament, when Pentecost comes, the church is birthed by God’s Spirit in Acts 2. The earliest

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<sup>39</sup>Gn 2:24.

<sup>40</sup>Gn 2:18.

<sup>41</sup>Rev 19:7.

<sup>42</sup>Jn 15:5.

Christian community in Jerusalem modeled paradigms of worship, communal life together and missional work (Acts 2:43-47; and Acts 4:32-37).

Biblical history reflects how God's chosen people had a strong tradition of forgetting and remembering. Losing sight of what it means to be the church can be a hindrance to the mission any congregation especially when a congregation is trying to adapt to new sociological/cultural settings. Tony Campolo, Professor Emeritus of Eastern University suggest, if the Church can introduce its people to Christ, disciple them with solid biblical teachings, it will change them into persons with commitments to social justice.<sup>43</sup>

Genesis chapter 2 focuses on humanity who is at the center of the creation story and nothing is mentioned which does not concern physical, spiritual, and social need. While *Adam* is created from the dust of the earth, *adamah* and thus has an intimate relationship with the passage found in Genesis 2:7, the woman is created from the rib of the man and is only indirectly related to the soil. In fact, the woman is taken from the rib of man and which was originally one flesh with him. This was the beginning of physical attraction. They were originally one flesh, and after the creation of the woman, they long to become one again. Therefore, this yearning is fulfilled in the unity of marital love and the subsequent merging of two lives coming together as one. A covenant is affirmed in the unity (Gn 2:23).

Today's culture is a secularly oriented contract driven society. The writer contends there is much to say on the subject of marriage in the Christian tradition, yet young many couples face the challenge of cohabitation as the main route before

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<sup>43</sup>Paul Nixon, *Healing Spiritual Amnesia: Remembering What it Means to be the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 9.

solemnizing their marriage union. Furthermore, the majority of couples hold to the belief that it is prudent to cohabitate before marriage. However, marriage is not a contract. Marriage is a binding blood covenant relationship revealed in God's love illustrated in the analogy of Christ and the church. In the beginning God created male and female in God's likeness, *Imago Dei* as coequals in the image and likeness of God? It is the Bible that reminds the reader of the critical aspect of a meaningful relationship of intimate union between husband and wife. From Genesis to Revelation the Bible draws a connection between God and Israel, a marriage covenant between husband and wife and the marriage between Christ and the church.

In Genesis 2:24, this passage reflects the intimate bond between husband and wife in the biblical concept called the marriage of one flesh. "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they shall become one flesh."

While the biblical idea emphasizes the unity of love in marriage, it is true one flesh union cannot exist unless there is love, intimacy, trust, communication, honesty and mutual accountability that are rooted in love. Paul exalts love when he indicates that all human accomplishments that are not rooted in love are empty in their emotions. A biblical view of marriage is built on love. The writer understands marriage to be one of the cornerstones of ancient Israelite society. It provided stability, strengthened family solidarity, and provided children.

Throughout the New Testament, letters of the Christian theologian Paul taught the people to love one another. Paul often wrote about interpersonal lifestyle transformations. There are several *one another* passages that talk about close, intimate, covenant relationships. For example, Included in the fifty-nine exhortations are:

- Devoted to one another (Roman 12:10)
- Honor one another (Romans 12:10)
- Serve one another (Galatians 5:13)
- Be kind and affectionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32)
- Encourage one another (Hebrew 3:13)
- Hospitality to one another (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:9)
- Love one another (2 John 5)

Biblically, the early church modeled community; members loved, served, prayed, and shared one another burdens (Gal 6:2). The writer's resolution for discussing as well as personal reflection about community is that few congregations are conscious about building biblical, healthy and holistic congregations. The Bible occupies a primary focus on identity, community, faithful discipleship and evangelism; helping people renew their faith journey. Thus, in Ephesians 4:7-16, Paul offers some insight into the strength of diversity that exists within the life of the congregation. Nevertheless, Paul avowed in Ephesians 4 verse 7 saying "Each member is given grace by Jesus Christ who has made different gifts available to each other according to his grace."<sup>44</sup>

### **Better Together as a Team**

The writer looks to the Bible for guidance in understanding the biblical context on health, healing, and wholeness in a healing community called the church. Michael I. N. Dash and Christine D. Chapman coauthors of, *The Shape of Zion: Leadership and Life in Black Churches* describe how a Christian congregation is a gathered community of faith

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<sup>44</sup>Eph 4:7.

with a story.<sup>45</sup> Dash and Chapman writes: Life in a congregation is the story of persons who are engaged together in a journey and experience with God and the under guidance of God's Spirit.<sup>46</sup> Co-authors Dash and Chapman proceed by stating it is a story of relationship and interaction.<sup>47</sup> Dash and Chapman affirm everyone contributes to the story out of his or her giftedness.<sup>48</sup> It is God who makes a diversity of gifts available to everyone, has gifted every person.<sup>49</sup> No one in the congregation comes to the table empty handed. Each member in the congregation is a valuable asset. This project is about providing congregational transformation, liberation and wholeness from a womanist perspective and Christological reflections on covenant congregational renewal. Although the writer wrestled with the themes of dominance, control, abuse, and low self-esteem, she reflects on the biblical foundation in this project to support empowerment, grounding herself spiritually for the ministry context she serves.

One of the most crucial things about a congregation is her culture and the things the congregation does together to create an atmosphere of community. The book, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* edited by Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney states most congregations engage in fellowship.<sup>50</sup> They want to know each other and care for each other, so they plan church

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<sup>45</sup>Michael I. N. Dash and Christine D. Chapman, *The Shape of Zion: Leadership and Life in Black Churches* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup>Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 85.

suppers, holiday parties, lunch after Sabbath services or grand feasts.<sup>51</sup> Whether participating in a Bible study or serving together on a soup line, shared activities in turn create an additional base on which the culture of the congregation can be built.<sup>52</sup> Culture is who we are, and the world we have created to live in.<sup>53</sup> It is who we are and all the ways in which we reinforce and recreate who we are.<sup>54</sup> A culture includes the congregation's history and stories and its heroes.<sup>55</sup>

Biblically, faith traditions have been the source of inspiration for bringing wholeness, healing, justice and the pursuit of creating a healthy and holistic web of relationships to work together, worship together as well as witness together.

Ronald W. Richardson postulates in the book *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* a new way to think about embracing unity and differences in the church. Richardson declares, clearly God's love for and redemptive activity on behalf of the world is one expression of the togetherness force in God.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Richardson agrees with Genesis 2:18, it is not good for man to be alone.<sup>57</sup> Richardson adds, the Bible is full of stories of coming and goings of connecting and separating; it is a book of active verbs. It tells lively stories about people

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 61.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 61.

on the move. One of the elements that made belonging to the early church such a dynamic experience is the variety of types of classes of people who were brought together in it; men and women; intellectuals and laborers, wealthy slave owners and their slaves; Gentiles and Jews; people of little religious experience and highly religious people; and people of various racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Churches have become much more homogenous in their makeup than the early church was. Social elements like class, race, and culture tend to determine who we will include in our fellowship, and who we will not include; who we are close to and who we are not. Church systems can keep themselves stagnant by building locked-in close/distant arrangements that allow them to connect only with similar kinds of people. Stuck churches are sometimes referred to as being full of cliques. The reason any of us are tempted to feel safe and comfortable; this is what sameness offers. Meeting new people or becoming related in new ways can provoke anxiety for many of us. As Christians, we believe that life comes to us from outside ourselves that God's Holy Spirit continues to bring us new life and energy every day.<sup>58</sup>

Common to all congregations is the family system within the life of the Black church. Richardson asserts one of the keys to functioning in a healthy manner as a church is for leaders to look at the church as a system rather than as a collection of isolated people.<sup>59</sup> Every church is more than a collection of individual members.<sup>60</sup> People in the

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 27.

church, as in any group, are intricately interconnected.<sup>61</sup> They exist in a system that is much bigger and more powerful than the individual members.<sup>62</sup> Even though each person has individual strength and liabilities, those attributes can change in different contexts or relationships.<sup>63</sup>

While it is crucial to note individuals members have his/her own personal identity, the church as a whole has a communal identity because the church members are connected to one another. Richardson further notes, each church member, past and present, affect every other church member, whether there is direct contact between them or not. Change in one member in a congregation can affect the whole.<sup>64</sup> What happens in the life of the church when the members of the church are not interconnected relationally, and they wrestle with what it means to live together in community within the life of the church as a church family? Paul insists that there is diversity and inclusion in the church. In addressing the church in Corinth, 1Corinthian 12:12-20 clearly talks about the importance of the connectedness of each part of the body.

For just as the body is one and has many members and all members of the body, though many are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 28.

If the whole body were hearing where would the sense of smell be?  
 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of  
 them, as he chose. If all were a single member where would be  
 body be? As it is, there are many members yet one body.

Today, to be a nurturing, caring and effective leader in the church one should consider the call to Christian discipleship. Disciples make other disciples. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, it states: *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*. After Paul rebuke the church in Corinth on division in the church, it is clear in 1 Corinthians 11:17-20 that the people are not together as the Corinthian Church gathered to participate in the Lord's Supper. In verses 17-18 of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul puts emphasis on *when you come together* in the covenant to share in the breaking of bread and drinking from the cup.

The New and Old Testament biblical covenant of the Christian community of faith, the covenant begins with an inclusive story of God's solidarity, which validates women as leaders, caregivers, matriarchs, mothers, prophetess, and midwives. Although, little is known of these women, they are known by the words they spoke, the action they took or the community/culture in which they lived.

In this section the writer shares from a womanist biblical, theological and historical perspective, the impact and importance of spiritual formation, authentic community, history, culture, identity and themes all of which emerged throughout this project. Because Jesus loved the whole person, his goal was to help the Christian community to be healthy in body, mind, spirit, and in relationships. Dr. Howard Clinebell, author of *Anchoring Your Well Being* reminds the reader:

The abundant life or life in its fullness is what is called spiritually empowered well-being, wholeness or wellness in the contemporary language. The fundamental purpose of the Christian life is to enable people to develop lifestyles of spiritually empowered wholeness throughout their life journeys and to help create a

society in which life in all its fullness is possible for all members of the human family.<sup>65</sup>

The call to a covenant community appears in the biblical text after the fall. It is the beginning of God's plan to restore and heal the world. The first covenant begins with Abraham and Sarah.<sup>66</sup> The covenant continues through Isaac and Jacob and expands to Israel a nation.<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey E. Greenway and Joel Green write about the call to covenant peoplehood, repentance, faith, obedience and community. Greenway and Green suggest in the book, *Grace and Holiness in a Changing World: A Wesleyan Proposal for Postmodern Ministry* since humankind went astray, rebelled and wandered from God, Yahweh raised up his own people, a holy people called to serve Him both in worship and witness.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, the authors, Greenway and Green add, God liberates Israel from slavery in Egypt and forms a covenant people for himself. God gives the people not only his law, but a whole way of life, an identity and a future as God's special people.<sup>69</sup>

Forming a covenant community frames the background for the Great Commission in the New Testament to be witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8); to make disciples of all nations and peoples.<sup>70</sup> The word *covenant* and peoplehood according to Greenway and Green remind the body of Christ

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<sup>65</sup>Howard Clinebell, *Anchoring Your Well Being: Christian Wholeness in a fractured World* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1997), 17.

<sup>66</sup>Jeffrey E. Greenway and Joel B. Green, *Grace and Holiness in a Changing World: A Wesleyan Proposal for Postmodern Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 64, 65.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*

that one's calling is not just to individuals but rather to a human community for collective work with God.<sup>71</sup> The second thing the covenant does is remind the church of diversity.<sup>72</sup> Greenway and Green also go on to say to readers that the call to peoplehood is a call to repentance, faith, obedience, and community.<sup>73</sup> Greenway and Green concur that the call to covenant peoplehood is not a call to an individual.<sup>74</sup> Thirdly, in Scripture the call to covenant peoplehood is unmistakably a call to holiness.<sup>75</sup> Likewise, Greenway and Green affirm holiness means wholeness, the integrity of the heart.<sup>76</sup> The call to covenant peoplehood is thus the call to salvation, to accept the healing offer that God graciously makes in Jesus Christ by the Spirit.<sup>77</sup> It is the gospel call to all nations, tribes, languages, and peoples.<sup>78</sup>

In the Bible, the covenant extends to all humanity to be the redeemed people of God in community with one another. Throughout the Bible, the church or ecclesia is referred to metaphorically as the body, building, and the bride. When a congregation is truly *being* the church, loving, healing and holistic, life-giving relationships with God and others are transformational.

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

Biblical history informs the Christian community that the church is to be a priesthood of all believers. Ministries within the church were meant to be shared by clergy and laity. With this in mind, the Bible is explicit in the Old and New Testament that the church is to God's holy covenant people. Today in the postmodern area in which we live, many believe the church is a social organization or a religious club. However, the model of ministry for all congregations is the biblical structure of *koinonia*, Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:35, building healthy, holy and loving, mutually accountable community. Even more importantly, the people devoted themselves to the teachings of the apostles' doctrine. Luke the physician, the writer of the book of Acts, describes life in the first century community in this way:

And they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.<sup>79</sup>

The Greek word, *koinonia* is translated as fellowship in Acts 2:42 and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. It also means partnership, communion, and companionship. A thorough examination of the biblical model of a healthy and holistic ministry found in Acts 2:42-47

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<sup>79</sup>Acts 2:42-47.

depicts that the early church was a church of community, prayer, and attentiveness to the Word of God, compassion, unity, worship, and fellowship.<sup>80</sup>

The New Testament declares plainly in Ephesians 5:18-21; “be filled with the Spirit.” This declaration calls the church to live in community with God and one another because God wants God’s people to share the loving, holy, spirit-filled character of God. Through the work of the Holy Spirit the church models true Christianity to reflect the attitudes of disciples of Jesus Christ. So, all in all, the Bible clearly teaches that every person, every part of the body of Christ has a role to play in the ministry of the church.

When the children of Israel left Egypt, departed out of bondage and settled in the wilderness the people were brought together in fellowship with the Lord. Moreover, each new generation brought vividly into remembrance sacred traditions of past customs that reminded them of God’s care for Israel in the wilderness as a covenant community. In many respects, Deuteronomy shows visible signs of oneness, represented mutual loyalty, mutual obedience, submission and mutual love for each other. In the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6: 1-4 comes to mind “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

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<sup>80</sup>Donald Hilliard, Jr., *Church Growth from an African American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 11, 12.

### **Congregational Leadership: Mission Possible**

The writer of this project in an observational approach has seen tremendous growth, spiritual vitality, and the emergence of small group ministries. New voices, new leaders, and new perspectives and leadership styles have emerged to move the congregation forward.

Mike Slaughter in his book, *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus* is correct in his assessment about discipleship training. Programs do not make disciples.<sup>81</sup> Disciples make disciples.<sup>82</sup> Slaughter affirms, relationships are crucial to the process of discipleship, but small groups must be more than fellowship. They must lead disciples out into the world.<sup>83</sup>

Fifty nine times the Bible encourages the Christian community to minister to one another. Twenty-one times the Bible also encourages to the body of Christ to love one another. The question is how do we implement these commandments with in the church? Evangelism and discipleship must be taken seriously. For example, the church in Jerusalem began in the upper room with 120 people (Acts 1:12-15). In response to the preaching to the gospel by Peter, the church grew (Acts 2:41). Acts 2:47 describes how the church continued to grow holistically and they had all things in common with each other. In addition to the aforementioned Christ came to give health, peace, purpose and passion to all. Sickness, suffering, and death are work of an antagonistic power. Of

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<sup>81</sup>Mike Slaughter, *Change the World: Recovering the Message and Mission of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 64-65.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

course, Satan is the destroyer and God is the restorer. The words spoken to Israel are true today of those who recover health of the body or health of soul and mind. *I am the Lord that healeth thee* (Ex 15:26).

Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, ed., *Women's Bible Commentary* assert, although women have read the Bible for countless generations. Newsome and Ringe both concur women have not always been self-conscious about reading as women.<sup>84</sup> During the women's movement in the late nineteenth and early twenty centuries there emerged a clear sense of the need for women to read the Bible self-consciously as women.<sup>85</sup> While the Bible is mainly written and interpreted from a male perspective, the writer recognizes the need to draw upon the biblical hermeneutics and interpretation of the biblical message of liberation and survival for empowerment through a different lens from a womanist perspective. Reading and interpreting the Scriptures through lens of liberation and survival for empowerment from a womanist perspective, the writer sees covenant relationships between women and men in the biblical story depicted as a major paradigm shift in understanding relationships and differences in diversity.

The diversity within the Bible represents a chorus of voices, both women and men. While focusing the common theme of loving one another, God made a covenant with Israel that of a community committed to living out love for God and others. The consistent witness throughout the Old and New Testament from Genesis to Revelation is that God is at work developing a community of people to participate in God's plan of

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<sup>84</sup>Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe, ed., *Women's Bible Commentary*, Expanded Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), xix.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*

redemption. Beginning with God, Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah in Genesis and continuing throughout the sacred texts the focus is on God's special relationship with the chosen people of God, Israel.

### **A Healthy Christian Covenant Community**

The purpose of the book of Exodus is to present the story of Israel as a covenant community. God has brought Israel out of Egypt and down the Sinai Peninsula to Mount Sinai. Here on Mount Sinai is where God made a covenant with Moses. The primary purpose of the covenant is made clear in Exodus 19:5-6a: "Now, therefore if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation."<sup>86</sup> These passages in Exodus 20:1-17 and Exodus 19:5-6a tells the readers a lot about how we are to worship God and how we are to get along with each other relationally. The black church in particular gets its relational strength from the African tribal system.

According to George Barna, the directing leader of The Barna Group, a company in Ventura, California that provides research and resources to Christian ministries and co-author Harry Jackson, Senior Pastor of Hope Christian Church in Washington, D.C. the traditional African believes that his or her connection with community is essential to his or her personal identity and survival.<sup>87</sup>

Barna and Jackson both agree in South African, the *Khosa* tribe has a word that

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<sup>86</sup>Ex 19:5-6a.

<sup>87</sup>George Barna and Harry R. Jackson, Jr., *High Impact African-American Churches* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books from Gospel Light), 184.

they use for community, *Ubuntu* “*I am because we are: we are because I am.*” Ubuntu speaks of covenant commitment.<sup>88</sup> In a community defined by Ubuntu ministry model the individual seeks the welfare of others corporately rather than one’s own personal objectives. The congregation adapts to a model of a loving church family where members feel connected to one another based on their loving commitment to Christ. A church that fosters true community makes a major difference in the congregational life of the church. Consequently, passion inspires members to move beyond just maintaining membership to passionate discipleship groups and purpose driven service ministries that will ultimately make a healthy and holistic difference in the Kingdom of God.

Revelations 2:1-7 addresses the love crisis in the church at Ephesus. This letter written to the Church at Ephesus is the first letter written to the most important city in Asia Minor. It is a commendation, a promise or an exhortation to the faithful. When Jesus looked at the Church at Ephesus he saw a lot of good things. He saw good works, He saw hard work and He saw how they continued to work in the Kingdom of God. You see, these were not lazy folk. They were diligent in the things of God. They had endured persecution and hardship for the sake of the Lord’s name. They lost their way. They had some heart issues. The Church at Ephesus left their first love. Somewhere along the way the church experienced a relapse in their relationship to God. They grew cold in their love relationship with God.

In Revelation 2:1-7 the Apostle John reminds the reader in a message from Jesus about the church in Ephesus:

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

I know your works, your toil, and your patient endurance. I know you cannot tolerate evildoers; you have tested those who claim to be apostles, but are not, and have found them to be false. I also know that you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of my name, and that you have not grown weary. But I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.

The writer turns to the book of Jeremiah 2: 1-8 and 3: 6-15 to address Israel's unfaithfulness to God followed by a call to repentance. The Word of the Lord to Jeremiah begins with a marital metaphor reminding Israel of her honeymoon experience with God followed by broken promises and a lack of commitment.

Jeremiah 2: 1-8, "The word of the Lord came to me Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: This is what the Lord says the Lord: I remember the devotion of your youths your love as a bride how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest. All who ate of it were held guilty; disaster came upon them, says the Lord. Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord, What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things and became worthless themselves? They did not say, "Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives? I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination. The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord." Those who handle the law did not know me; the rulers transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Jer 2:1-8.

### **For Better or For Worse**

In the earliest days of God and Israel's relationship a covenant in the wilderness became a marriage. Israel's idolatry was interpreted as betrayal and adultery. Meanwhile, brokenness occurs in Israel's relationship with God, a painful breakdown in the marriage leads to an estrangement of divorce on the other hand the pieces of the marriage are put back together as a reunion of God and Israel discovered healing and wholeness in reconciliation. The Word of the Lord to Jeremiah begins with a marital metaphor reminding Israel of her honeymoon experience with God. The passage focuses on how good the relationship used to be. Things changed when Israel forsook God, strayed, and stubbornly followed their own hearts rather than following God.

King Saul's, successor David lived in a state of carnality when he committed adultery with Bathsheba but committed murder and then tried to cover it up until Nathan the prophet confronted him. David's Son Solomon was a great king. The first ten chapters of 1 Kings remind us how wonderfully committed he was. The Bible says Solomon prayed, don't give me riches, and give me wisdom. But the Bible also says in 1 Kings 11:1 Solomon loved many foreign women. We know the story Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (women on the side) these women turned Solomon's heart away and he went after other gods. Sometime we are like the church at Ephesus we misplace our priorities and leave our first love.

Biblically, the foundational backbone of the church rest against the backdrop of Matthew 16:18, *Jesus said on this rock I will build my church and the very gates of hell*

*shall not prevail against it.*<sup>90</sup> This passage is consistent with the teachings of Jesus as he teaches about the Kingdom of God. Therefore, biblically, Jesus prophesied about the church in Matthew 16:18. And then the manifestation of the church become a reality as the disciples are commissioned in Matthew 28:18 to continue the ministry of Christ obeying God's instruction to go out into the world inspired by the Holy Spirit to spread the gospel from Jerusalem to Rome and beyond to all parts of the earth.

In other words the church grew, as the people were devoted to teaching, preaching, eating, fellowshiping, praying, and sharing together as they went from house to house. What is the church? What is its purpose? Is it a building, an organization or an institution? By all mean no. The church is the gathered people of God, the household of faith, the bride of Christ?

Most importantly, the church is not the building nor is the church the pastor. To define church is to begin with the first century Christians in Antioch. It's easy to lose sight of the mission of the church once a person. The church established in first century times in Antioch originated as a collective group of people who clearly understood fellowshiping, breaking bread together and what it meant to come together in unity. The first century community understood what it meant to come together in oneness in body, mind and spirit. The church refers to a body of believers from all walks of life that have been, are or will be called out or set apart for the sake of glorifying God as well as empowering and edifying the people of God. Without a doubt, the church is not a building or edifice.

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<sup>90</sup>Mt 16:18.

In the book *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* authors Frank Viola and George Barna both contend that many contemporary Christians have a love affair with brick and mortar.<sup>91</sup> Viola and Barna articulate that the edifice is so ingrained in our thinking that if a group of believers begins to meet together their first thoughts are toward securing a building.<sup>92</sup> For how can a group of Christians rightfully claim to be a church without a building?<sup>93</sup> In Greco-Roman paganism, Pagans had temples, priest and sacrifices.<sup>94</sup> According to research church consultants, in the minds of the early Christians, the people—not the architecture—constituted a sacred space.<sup>95</sup>

The early Christians understood that they themselves—corporately—were the temple of God and the house of God.<sup>96</sup> Strikingly, nowhere in the New Testament do we find the terms church (*ekklesia*), temple, or house of God used to refer to a building. The first recorded use of the word (*ecclesia*) to refer to a Christian meeting was penned around AD 190 by Clement of Alexander (150-215). Clement was also the first person to use the phrase *go to church* which would have been a foreign thought to the first century believers.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity: Exploring the Roots of Our Church Practices* (Carol Stream, IL: 2012), 10.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 12.

Viola and Barna concur that you cannot go to something you are.<sup>98</sup> Throughout the New Testament, (*ecclesia*) always refer to an assembly of people, not a place.<sup>99</sup> *Ecclesia*, in every one of its 114 appearances in the New Testament, refers to an assembly of people.<sup>100</sup> The English word *church* is derived from the Greek word *kuriakon*, which means “belonging to the Lord.” In time it took on the meaning of God’s house and referred to a building.<sup>101</sup> Clément’s reference to going to church is not a reference to attending a special building for worship.<sup>102</sup> It rather refers to a private home that the second century Christians used for their meetings.<sup>103</sup> Christians did not erect special buildings for worship until the Constantine era in the fourth century.<sup>104</sup>

Graydon F. Snyder state until the year 300 we know of no buildings first built as churches.<sup>105</sup> When Roman Catholicism evolved in the fourth to the sixth centuries, it absorbed many of the religious practices both Pagan and Judaism.<sup>106</sup> It set up a

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<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante Pace: Archeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 67.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 12.

professional priesthood.<sup>107</sup> It erected sacred buildings. And it turned the Lord's Supper into a mysterious sacrifice.<sup>108</sup>

## HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Historically, Christians worshipped as one church. Beginning with the Council of the Nicene Creed history comes alive communally in with the Council of the Nicene Creed (325) Christian creeds. They were creeds that exposed a major discussion on unity of the Godhead and the dual nature of the Godhead. From the apostolic age to the beginning of the council of churches to the emergence of the early Christian Catholic Church there was severe persecution, disunity, tension, cultural oppression over doctrine, gender biases, authority of scripture, emperor worship and significant discussion over religious concerns and what was considered to be the acceptable practices of the Catholic Church. These differences created dissension among the Christian community embracing the teachings of Jesus. By the time of the second century, the people were dealing with a major misunderstanding of authority.

According to Joseph H. Lynch, author of the *Medieval Church* Lynch asserts it was around 200 CE that the Catholic Church began to organize herself as an institutionalized church, a place to teach about Jesus, the authority of scripture and establish their core beliefs.<sup>109</sup> It was during this era that the Catholic Church established

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

<sup>109</sup>Joseph H. Lynch, *The Medieval Church: A Brief History* (New York, NY: Longman Publishing, 1992).

some model of creedal statements to affirm their Christian belief in order to support and address the various areas of persecution and oppression as Christians against Roman authorities. Historically, in AD 312, Constantine became Caesar of the Western Empire. By 324, he became emperor of the entire Roman Empire. It was his mother, Helena who influenced him in his Christian faith. Shortly after his conversion experience, he began ordering the construction of church building. Constantine did so to promote the return of the Christian to the Christian faith. It is important to note following Constantine's conversion to Christianity, he never abandoned sun worship. However, historians continue to debate whether or not Constantine was a genuine Christine.

In AD 321, Constantine decreed that Sunday would be a day of rest, a legal holiday. Almost to his dying day, Constantine still functioned as a pagan priest. In fact, all evidence confirmed Constantine was a narcissist, an individualist or an egotist. When he built the Church of the Apostles in Constantinople, he included monuments to the twelve apostles.

Historically, buildings erected during this era had their own identity. A brief survey of church history in the fourth century by Roberti C. Bondi in her book, *Conversations with the Early Church: To Love As God Loves*, notes in the fourth century what called so many men and women away from ordinary life in the world and into the desert was the command of Jesus: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:58).<sup>110</sup> According to Bondi she states, strangely enough from our modern perspective this commandment did not seem either repulsive or impossible to them. Bondi goes on to

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<sup>110</sup>Roberti C. Bondi, *Conversations with the Early Church: To Love as God Loves* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 20.

state, to us is suggest legalism, or it fills us with despair or bafflement. However, Bondi further concludes for ancient fourth century people the commandment to be perfect was simply another way of phrasing the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind: and your neighbor as yourself” (Lk10: 27).<sup>111</sup> What Jesus asked of those who took up his life was perfect love.<sup>112</sup> Love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12). He who does not love abides in death (1 Jn 3:14).

Fourth century Church History documented by Bondi asserts that loving is natural; it is unnatural not to love.<sup>113</sup> Roberti Bondi says most human beings fail to love or love badly because we are dominated by the fear of death and of our own physical and emotional vulnerability; and by our own ways of compensating this fear. Bondi affirms these things about the human nature of people in the chapter on love on page 20 of her book *Conversations with the Early Church: To Love as God Loves*. Bondi suggest we need power over people, we are afraid of the future and we suffer from envy, resentments, depression, hyperactivity, and boredom.<sup>114</sup> Case in point, Bondi declares our fourth century ancestors thought none of this talk about love was necessary which resulted in the movement of monasticism. It is true; in fourth century culture as it is in the

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

post-modern area of today somewhere along the way they lost their focus, forgot their goal confusing their means with their end according to Bondi.<sup>115</sup>

The real goal of the Christian life is to love God and your neighbor. Nonetheless, ancestors of Aristotle and Plato believed that human beings were not perfect like God. Ancient philosophers believed perfection must be unchanging, static and complete.<sup>116</sup> However, Gregory of Nyssa, a great fourth century writer on Christian life did not agree with the ideology of Aristotle and Plato and the Greek historian Herodotus. Gregory of Nyssa said, "To be a human being, one has to change." It is the ways God made us when God set in creation, for creation itself is always changing.<sup>117</sup> Early Christian monastics desire was to love God with their whole hearts to model the kind of love that represents more than a warm fuzzy feeling.

### **History of Church Mergers**

In *The Modern Church: From the Dawn of the Reformation to the Eve of the Third Millennium*, Glenn T. Miller has written a historical survey on the collaboration and union of churches as their ethnic identity weakened many of the churches merged to strengthen their identity as a Christian denomination.

In 1962 the Lutheran Church in American was formed by the merger of the united Lutheran Church, the American evangelical Lutheran Church, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church (Suomi Synod) and the Augustana Synod. In 1960 the American Lutheran Church was formed by the merger of the

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<sup>115</sup>Ibid.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid.

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

American Lutheran Church (itself the result of the earlier Union of the Ohio, Buffalo, Iowa, and Texas synods) with the United Evangelical Lutheran church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Lutheran Free Church (a Norwegian body) joined the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through the union of the Lutheran Church in America, the American Lutheran Church, and the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. While some smaller Lutheran bodies still exist, the vast majority of American Lutherans are either members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America or the strongly confessional Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Methodists have also largely overcome the centrifugal effects of their American past. In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Church merged with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, to form the Methodist Church, thus healing the breach caused by the Civil War. In 1968 this united church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren church (itself the result of the 1946 union between the Church of the United Brethren in Christ and the Evangelical Church) to form the United Methodist Church. In 1931 the Congregational Churches of New England merged with the Christian Churches, a branch of the Disciples founded by Barton Stone. At about the same time (1934) the General Synod of the reformed Church and the Evangelical synod of North America merged to form the Evangelical and the reformed Church. These two streams united in 1957 to form the united Church of Christ. American Presbyterians have long had problems finding unity among themselves.

During the First and Second Great Awakenings, the church experienced schism and, later, reunion. Besides theology, the most divisive issue was the conflict between North and South. In 1963 the Northern church, the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and the Southern church, the Presbyterian Church in the United States, merged to form the new Presbyterian Church (USA). The Consultation of church Union (COUC) was the most comprehensive proposal for church union. Although the consultation began with four denominations, it quickly grew to encompass nine separate churches: the African Methodist Episcopal, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion, Christian Methodist Episcopal, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Episcopal Church, the United Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church (USA), and the United Methodist Church.

During the 1960's the participating churches made progress toward finding common ground. After long discussions, the churches discovered that they shared many common ideas on ministry, theology, and Christian faith. These theological agreements led to the adoption of the 1970 A Plan of Union for the

church of Christ Uniting. Unfortunately, the plan called for an elaborate, bureaucratic system of church government that proved too cumbersome to put into operation. In 1988 the participating churches agreed to try a different system of church union called covenanting. The new proposal shifted COCU's emphases from development of a formal plan of church union to the development of a system of shared practice in which common participation in the Eucharist, the mutual recognition of baptism, and acts of fellowship gradually became an awareness of common faith.<sup>118</sup>

### **The Historical Power of Connection in the Wesleyan Tradition**

Historically, the Black church has been intimately connected to health, welfare, and vitality of the family. The Black church has served as the central institution to transforming the lives of individuals. Author, Kenneth H. Hill and Presiding Elder of the East Tennessee Annual Conference and Retired General Officer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church draws from the deep wells of *Religious Education in the African American Tradition: A Comprehensive Introduction* as he writes, from its earliest days in Africa, and as an invisible spiritual community in North America, the Black church obviously was a sanctuary against the violent and destructive character of the slave world.<sup>119</sup> Hill acknowledges that the Black church historically created an environment of spiritual awareness in which one could experience faith freedom and know faith by participating in the life of the church.<sup>120</sup>

The early formation of the Methodist movement began within the historical context of the Wesleyan movement to recapture the spiritual vitality within the church for

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<sup>118</sup>Glenn T. Miller, *The Modern Church: From the Dawn of the Reformation to the Eve of the Third Millennium* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 274 -276.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

the sole purpose of making disciples. At the heart of John Wesley's nurturing and Christian discipleship concept was the idea of class meetings, bands, and societies. Small groups met weekly to give account of their personal spiritual growth, according to the rules of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. D. Michael Henderson in his book, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* Henderson declares, the class meetings encapsulated several of the key principles of New Testament Christianity: personal growth within the context of an intimate fellowship, accountability for spiritual stewardship, bearing one another's burdens and speaking the truth in love.<sup>121</sup> It serves as a model for those who have accepted the command of Jesus to make disciples.<sup>122</sup> The primary value in studying the class meeting today is to gain insights and methods for the Church's central task: making disciples.<sup>123</sup> As the secular world has grown more sophisticated in its ability to gather and transmit information, the Church has co-opted many of its methods.<sup>124</sup> John Wesley was able to cut through the trappings of Anglicanism and recapture the spirit of *koinonia*, the supportive fellowship of primitive Christianity.<sup>125</sup> Those who are committed to making disciples in the world of the twenty-first century will do well to learn from him the intricate workings of the class meeting and how those interactions fostered spiritual growth and serious discipleship.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press of Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 14.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup>The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2008 (Nashville, TN: AMEC Sunday School Union, 2008), 37.

In *The Book of Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church 2008*, the General Rules of the United Societies state these historical facts concerning which brought a national spiritual renewal in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century by John Wesley.<sup>127</sup> Wesleyan evangelism became the principal means through which Richard Allen developed the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>128</sup> Early in the life and ministry of Wesley, noted the importance that the church is a connection.<sup>129</sup> Spirituality was restored by way of the Wesleyan tradition in the class meeting systems of the Methodist movement. In the words of John Wesley, *the do no harm, do good, practice spiritual disciplines and watch over one another in love* captures the framework for accountable discipleship and evangelism to reawaken the spiritual vitality for creating a sense of covenant community in the congregational life of the church. Wesley formed societies and classes in which members met in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.<sup>130</sup> Salvation was to be worked out in Christian community through mutual support and accountability.<sup>131</sup>

Gwen Purushotham, in the book, *Watching Over One Another In Love: A Wesleyan Model for Ministry Assessment* uses a quote from Kenneth Carder's book, *Living Our Beliefs: the United Methodist Way*:

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<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid.

<sup>129</sup>Russell E. Richey, *Methodism Connectionalism: Historical Perspectives* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2009), 5.

<sup>130</sup>Gwen Purushotham, *Watching Over One Another in Love: A Wesleyan Model for Ministry Assessment* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2007), 8.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

Christian discipleship requires being held in love and being held accountable. We simply cannot follow Christ apart from a community that holds us in compassion and calls us to accountability. Solitary discipleship is a misnomer. We cannot be Christian alone. Only with support, corrections, and help of other disciples can we follow Christ. Christian discipleship is a journey toward maturity in Christ, requiring a lifetime of discipline and accountability.<sup>132</sup>

Within the historical social cultural context of Methodism, the spiritual awakening that transformed England and America was led by George Whitfield and John and Charles Wesley in the late 1700s and early 1800s. As early as 1739, John Wesley organized converts into societies, bands, and class meetings. Class meetings were a means of grace in forming spiritual communities within the church.<sup>133</sup> Wesley called these spiritual communities *a church within the church*.<sup>134</sup> Wesley's goal was for the converts to live a holy and disciplined life. For two hundred years, the Class Meeting was the Methodist form of evangelism.<sup>135</sup>

To return to the Wesleyan/Methodist Way, the church needs to return to the Wesleyan Class Meeting System.<sup>136</sup> With the radical development and implementation of the class meeting system in the Methodist tradition, John Wesley began a radical movement of mutual accountability in discipleship and evangelism. John Wesley was an avid proponent of mutual accountability through class meetings, individualized pastoral

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<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>Russell E. Richey, *Methodism Connectionalism: Historical Perspectives* (Nashville, TN: General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 2009), 5.

<sup>134</sup>Ibid.

<sup>135</sup>James Scott and Molly Scott, *Restoring the Wesleyan Class-Meeting* (Dallas, TX: Provident Publishing, 2008) 9.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 13.

care, discipleship accountability, evangelism, and empowerment of lay leadership in the early phases of his ministry. Wesley found a class meeting system that interconnected individuals relationally to meet the spiritual needs of the people and future generations.<sup>137</sup>

With the Great Awakening as the backdrop of renewal in Methodism, Wesley and his lay leadership introduced thousands of new converts to the Christian faith into a practical discipleship and education model that lasted well beyond his death in the 1791. The principles of faith formation and discipleship that Wesley and his leaders utilized in this discipleship program will be analyzed. The application of these foundational principles of Christian spiritual growth will be discussed in relation to the 21<sup>st</sup> century American church and culture. Historically, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was a merger of Black Methodist churches as a protest against enslavement.

The historical context of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) began as the church was emancipated from St. Georges Episcopal Church by Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and others. The emergence of the Black Methodist movement so named for its distinctive methods of organization and its spiritual discipline began as a Holy Club of students at Christ Church College in Oxford University in the mid 1720's according to C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, in the book *The Black Church in the African American Experience*.<sup>138</sup> Within the context of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Church mothers and fathers began a unified mission to understand the covenant community of ecclesiology, Holy Trinity, salvation, the sacraments, the

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid.

<sup>138</sup>C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 45.

authority of scriptures and other crucial components of African Methodism. The founder of African Methodism, Richard Allen espoused the same views of John Wesley in the 39 Articles of religion of the Church of England. However, the African Methodist Episcopal Church embraced only 25 of those Articles as their basic tenets of belief to promote unity within the church. Historically, from an early onset the African Methodist Episcopal church was born out of a wounded struggle for liberation.

In opposition to the oppressive force of slavery the AME Church was founded. In 1787 Richard Allen and Absalom Jones and others withdrew from St. Georges' Methodist Episcopal Church. Allen's mission as an apostle of freedom was divinely inspired by God to lift from slavery people who were oppressed by bondage and racism.<sup>139</sup> Allen's ministry was not totally relegated in building churches, schools and mutual aid societies for his own sake. Allen took pride in gathering the people together to receive the Lord's deliverance and to serve God in a Promise Land of salvation even in places where the people were once enslaved.<sup>140</sup>

A proper examination of Allen's ministry shows women were restricted to preach the gospel. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence C. Mamiya comments Jarena Lee, trailblazer for women in the African Methodist Episcopal Church remained patient but persistent in her desire to preach.<sup>141</sup> According to Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie in her book "*Not Without a Struggle*" history interprets women as the weaker sex or even lesser sex."<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid.

<sup>142</sup>Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1996),

McKenzie further asserts unless we reconstruct the experiences of foremothers from available sources, we leave a wealth of contributions and history undisclosed.<sup>143</sup> She further states, we also deny the role that individual women played in the evolving ecclesia.<sup>144</sup> McKenzie declares many societies relegated women to the fringes of community life.<sup>145</sup> Their roles were limited to household duties, giving birth and the rearing of infants and children as the operative focus of conversation in the early Christian community.<sup>146</sup> For centuries patriarchal systems tried to silence women in the early Christian era and keep women polarized by sexual double standards for males in the church, exclusion of women in leaderships roles and the emphasis of female purity. Consequently, women remained invisible primarily because they did not think their experiences, activities, and spheres was worthy of historical interest. In a reconstruction of hermeneutical interpretation history for women is now being interpreted with a new understanding of liberation. Women are now viewing their narratives as *her story* rather than *his story*. The historical painful experiences of Black women in ministry, church, and society serve as the guiding premise to understanding a womanist model of healing and wholeness. Without a doubt, pain and suffering is not new to women and especially to African American women. Survival for Black women in ministry has not been. The quest to understand the author's own painful experiences, as a Black woman in pastoral leadership has not been one without a struggle.

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<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>146</sup>Ibid.

As Black women struggle for leadership in theology and ecclesiastical structures to have their voices heard, womanist theology breaks the silence on pain and suffering. Black women are now telling their story without fear and trembling. Traditionally the typical image of the ordained ministry was a position held by men. The belief that women must conform to a certain standard of being a woman in ministry is a myth. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, this image has change significantly. Jareena Lee, an African American woman against all odds challenged Richard Allen and others in the oppressive system of patriarchal dominance in the African Methodist Episcopal Church on more than one occasion invading the male dominated preaching fraternity designated for men only. A womanist model of healing and wholeness was birthed at Mother Bethel AME Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania through Richard and Sarah Allen. Historically, Bishop Richard Allen founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787, pastor, self-affirmer, and proclaimer of liberation was one of God's fearless prophets during the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>147</sup> Allen's mission as an apostle of freedom was divinely inspired by God to lift from slavery people who were oppressed by bondage and racism.<sup>148</sup> Allen took pride in gathering the people together to receive the Lord's deliverance and to serve God in a Promise land of salvation even in places where the people were once enslaved.<sup>149</sup>

The dramatic exodus from St. George's Methodist's Church caused by thoughtless and deliberate acts of humiliation created quite a stir in the City of Brotherly

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<sup>147</sup>Frederick Hilborn Talbot, *God's Fearless Prophet* (Nashville, TN: AMEC Publishing House, 2002), 11.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid.

Love.<sup>150</sup> It marked the Genesis of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>151</sup> On April 12, 1787, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others formed a group known as the free African Society (FAS), a pioneer organization.<sup>152</sup> The Free African Society was the first wavering step of people toward organized group life.<sup>153</sup> Besides worship, this group helped people of African descent to become more self-reliant, industrious, and thrifty.<sup>154</sup>

The African Methodist Episcopal Church embraces the Episcopal structure modeled leadership of John Wesley. The Motto of the AME Church is “*God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, the Holy Spirit Our Comforter, Humankind Our Family*” is a great summary of what the African Methodist Episcopal Church believes. The AME Church abbreviated to mean the African Methodist Episcopal Church founded by Richard Allen was born as a result of enslavement, adversities of racial indifferences and social justice in a day and time when it was not popular for blacks and whites to worship together. While the AME Church was born as a result of enslavement, adversities of racial indifferences and social justice in a day and time when it was not popular for blacks and whites to worship together, the basic foundational tenets of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is yearned for wholeness in her willingness to affirm the suffering and the broken.

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

### **Her Story/ His Story**

History is a valuable teacher. Historically, women have been marginalized, victimized and viewed through the lenses of patriarchal systems of oppressions. For the most part women did not have starring roles in ministry, in society or in the church. Phyllis Bird in her essay “The Place of Women in the Israelite Cultus” shares critical insight about the place of women in the Israelite society as she raises the awareness about the roles and activities of women verses the roles and activities of men.<sup>155</sup> Birds’ presupposition on women’s roles in Israelite society suggest in order to comprehend the religion of the Israelite society a reconstruction of the history of the Israelite religion is needed and not a new chapter on women.<sup>156</sup> In addition Bird further states, “Until that is done, the place of women will remain incomprehensible and inconsequential in its isolation, and our understanding of an Israelite religion will remain partial, distorted and finally unintelligible.”<sup>157</sup>

Despite the controlling influence of a male ruler in a patriarchal society, on occasion women played the role of the Queen where there was an absence of the male ruler. As early as third and fourth centuries women were restricted to house churches hosted by women and participated in household duties as slaves beyond their control. Some roles for women were anonymous, never mentioned, imaginary or misunderstood.

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<sup>155</sup> Alice Bach, *Women in the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 6.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 4.

Women in the early Christian community survived through a time of the shame and honor system.

During the time of the Greco-Roman antiquity and early Christianity, women were polarized by the control of their father who had legal custody over them and women could not act as a legal person without a male tutor or legal guardian as patriarchal. Roman society remained highly patriarchal and the cultural values were passed on to Judaism and Christianity.

Vashti M. McKenzie contends women were under complete control of *paterfamilias* according Roman law. In spite of abusive socio-cultural views of oppression Jesus broke through the barriers of inequality to bring healing to the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to open the prisons to those who were bound liberating women from oppression. Many of the narratives about Jesus highlight key roles to women, which meant inclusion in the Christian community. Vashti Murphy McKenzie notes in her book *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development For African American Women in Ministry* history interprets women as the weaker sex or even lesser sex.<sup>158</sup>

McKenzie further suggests unless we reconstruct the experiences of foremothers from available sources, we leave a wealth of contributions and history undisclosed.” She further states, we also deny the role that individual women played in the evolving ecclesia.<sup>159</sup> McKenzie goes on to say, many societies relegated women to the fringes of

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<sup>158</sup>Vashti M. McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* (New York, NY: Pilgrim Press, 1996).

<sup>159</sup>Ibid.

community life.<sup>160</sup> Their roles were limited to household duties, giving birth, and the rearing of infants and children as the operative focus of conversation in the early Christian community.

For centuries patriarchal systems tried to silence women in the early Christian era and keep women polarized by sexual double standards for males in the church, exclusion of women in leaderships roles and the emphasis of female purity. Consequently in spite of societal limitations and oppression, McKenzie adds women were empowered to provide leadership even as they struggled in circumstances deemed demeaning by today's cultural status.<sup>161</sup> During the Hellenistic period women did not gain political rights and a voice in social affairs through philosophy or social reform, but rather through economics. Female leadership in the Roman culture was excluded from the highest religious offices.<sup>162</sup> In fact, women were allowed to participate fully in leadership roles, as worship acolytes, lay readers, or members of altar guilds.<sup>163</sup> History for women today is being interpreted with a new understanding of what it means to be liberated.

In the book *Why Not Women: a Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership*, co-Authors, Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton note the importance of women in the revival movements. Cunningham and Hamilton add it was Susanna Wesley who preached to more than two hundred people every week in

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid., 9

<sup>163</sup>Ibid.

prayer meetings, which she led in her husband's parish.<sup>164</sup> Wesley said, "Since God uses women in the conversion of sinners, who am I that I should withstand God."<sup>165</sup> Two influential women in the Holiness movement of the nineteenth century were Phoebe Palmer and Hannah Whitall Smith. Furthermore, the Wesleyan Methodist Church ordained its first woman in 1863.<sup>166</sup> And in 2000 the African Methodist Episcopal Church elected and consecrated its first female bishop, Vashti Murphy McKenzie.

### **Brief History of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church**

In March of 1992 Cedar Grove AME Church received notification that the Department of Transportation would be widening the Highway 231 South, also known as the Shelbyville, Highway and the church's property would be affected. After extensive discussion between the members of the church, present pastor Reverend Thomas Holman and Presiding Elder William Forrest Scruggs made an agreement and the property was sold to the State of Tennessee. In November 1993, Cedar Grove AME Church merged with Webb Chapel AME Church under the leadership of Reverend Leland Webster to form the union of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church that is presently located on Barfield Crescent Rd, Murfreesboro, TN.

According to the Church's history, Webb Chapel AME church was founded in 1865. Land for Webb Chapel AMEC was purchased in 1881 by the trustees of the church who were: Sam Alexander, George Alexander and John Hutchinson. No one knows the

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<sup>164</sup>Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton, *Why Not Women: A Fresh Look at Scriptures on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 25.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

name of the first pastor of Webb Chapel AME. The deed was later updated in 1907 and recorded with the pastor's name as Reverend James Childress and the trustees: John W. Bracy, A. B. Turner, Henry Batts, Nelson Rucker, and Riley Erwin. Between 1887 and 1907 no one knows where Webb Chapel AME worshipped for approximately twenty-three years. It was recorded that historical data was lost and according to oral tradition church services were held at Brush Arbor.

Cedar Grove AME Church was founded in 1890. Some of the members that were remembered in the early church of Cedar Grove AME Church were: The Basketts, Brooks, Daniels, Fletchers, Fraziers, Halls, Jenkins, Maupins, McGills, Millers, Parkers, Ruckers, Spenses, Wades, Watkins, Whitworths, Stovalls, Johnsons, Harris and Vaughns. Homecoming was held the first Sunday in August. The early church at Cedar Grove AMEC would spread dinner on a wire table, and later used a wood table or wood bench to hold all of the food that the people brought. Family, friends and churches in the community would come from far and near on this day to praise the Lord and see those they had not seen in a long time. Minos Fletcher and family (white) donated the land to build land for Cedar Grove AME Church; In March of 1890, the church was erected with the help of black families and friends. Some of the Former Pastors included: Reverend Gillespie, Reverend Sydney Bryant, Reverend Dr. Clement Fugh, Reverend Robert Keesee, Reverend Freeman Marco Cooper Sr., Reverend Leland Webster, and a host of other pastors who led these two congregations to this present day.

## THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

### A Theology of Community

Community is a unifying theme in the history of the people of God, but the concept of community undergoes considerable development in the epochs reflected in Scripture.<sup>167</sup> In an essay entitled, *Why Bother with Theology*, William C. Placher conveys to the reader; theology means thinking about faith.<sup>168</sup> The word theology comes from two Greek words that mean thinking about God.<sup>169</sup> For the sake of this project the writer will offer insight about the Theology of Community. One of the first attempts to understand community is expressed in the Apostles' Creed. Hughes Oliphant Old suggest the core of this text comes to us from the year of 200. The creed confesses, I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints and the forgiveness of sins....Old argues the Trinitarian understanding of God makes clear the unity of God. Furthermore, Old puts it like this, the church is a communion or fellowship which is an important reality of the church.<sup>170</sup> The writer understands communion or fellowship as a pivotal point concerning the sacrament of communion. Additionally, Old asserts the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a sign and a promise of true community, the fellowship

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<sup>167</sup>Molly T. Marshall, *Joining In the Dance: A Theology of the Spirit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 74.

<sup>168</sup>Hugh Oliphant Old, *Essay, Why Bother With Church, Essentials of Christian Theology*, edited by William Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

<sup>169</sup>Ronald J. Allen, *Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian Elements of Preaching Series* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 4.

<sup>170</sup>*Ibid.*

of the people of God in the household of faith.<sup>171</sup> In the tradition of the African Methodist Episcopal Church every Sunday the congregation at Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church recites the Apostle's Creed as a reminder that Webb Grove AME Church is a part of the Christian Community. It is an integral part of the worship services as it was in the early Christian Church. If Webb Grove AME church is to return to her first love the church the Protestant Reformation aims recovering the original vision of the mission of the church.

### **Theology of the Spirit in forming a Community**

Molly T. Marshall, in the book *Joining The Dance: A Theology of the Spirit* says, the mission Dei (God's) universal mission as narrated in the historical and prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures is to form a community to share in this mission.<sup>172</sup> The community of God's people will be characterized by the worship of Yahweh.<sup>173</sup> Marshall further comments that the midwifery of the Spirit in birthing a people was never meant for the benefit of Israel alone but rather, the community drawn together in Spirit was to be a channel of gracious inclusion for all seekers of the true God.<sup>174</sup> Marshall recalls a similar account of community where Israel's history of being strangers in a foreign land was to stand as a reminder to practice ways of tangible inclusion, shelter, meals, and an

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<sup>171</sup>Hugh Oliphant Old, Essay, *Why Bother With Church, Essentials of Christian Theology*, edited by William Placher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 232.

<sup>172</sup>Molly T. Marshall, *Joining In the Dance, A Theology of the Spirit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 45.

<sup>173</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>174</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

invitation to share in worship.<sup>175</sup> Finally Marshal adds, the Spirit's gathering and forming community stretched the boundaries of inclusion.<sup>176</sup>

### Womanist Perspective

Womanist theology is not a new phenomenon. Womanist is about empowerment of African American women and the freedom to use their gifts in the church and society. It is an emergent voice of African American Christian women's critical reflection on liberation and inclusion for all people. According to Alice Walker, since the 1970's, womanist theology emerged from the misrepresentation and devaluation of Black women in church, society, and community. The discipline of theology shifted when Black women began to collectively have open conversations about social relations and political. Employing Alice Walker's definition of womanish, the term woman refers to being fully grown, as opposed to girlish and immature. Alice Walker birthed the term womanist; she created it from the "Black folk expression mothers used on sassy children."<sup>177</sup> Patterson acknowledges womanist theology emerged in the 1970's as sister theologians grew weary of hearing others speak for them about God.<sup>178</sup> The coining of the term womanist refers to the woman-experiences of African American women. Author, Alice Walker asserts that *womanism* is our being responsible, in charge, courageous, and bodacious enough to demand the right to think independently of both white and African American men and

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<sup>175</sup>Stephanie Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 5.

<sup>176</sup>Ibid.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid.

white women.<sup>179</sup> The womanist theological perspective is empowering for Black women while at the same time it does not put men down, devalue them or their worth as African American men. Womanist theology promotes equality for all humanity.

The writer's womanist perspective is the lens through which she views and evaluates her theological perspective. Marsha Boyd Foster's healthy and holistic short but compelling essay of womanist pastoral theology, or Womanist Care in *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation and Transformation*, in a book edited by Emilie M. Townes emphasizes an indication of who the writer has become as Foster Boyd articulates the importance of being an *empowered cojourner*.<sup>180</sup> One who faced the spirit of death, defeat, and discouragement very similar to the difficulties and defeats of life as a *cojourner* with Foster Boyd. Likewise, Boyd declares, the word cojourner was developed by Cecilia Williams Bryant. Williams Bryant indicates that *a cojourner is a person or persons whom heaven has summoned to journey with us*.<sup>181</sup> Cojourners are spiritual companions brought together on a common path for a particular time.<sup>182</sup>

During the course of the writer's twenty-five years in ministry she has learned many lessons from her mentors which significantly along the way have taught her to just love the people. Boyd says in her model of Womanist Care of womanist pastoral theology, just love the folk and listen to their stories. Foster Boyd outlines five components of a pastoral theology of Womanist Care the writer thinks can be adaptable

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid.

<sup>180</sup>Emilie M. Townes, editor, *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), xvii.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 39.

for women pastors who share the same burden she does as she offers pastoral care to reclaim the mission of discipleship at Webb Grove: (1) Communication; (2) affirmation; (3) confrontation; (4) accountability; (5) and healing.<sup>183</sup> Foster Boyd says Womanist Care functions best in small group settings and through cultivation of friendships and interdependent relations between Black women.<sup>184</sup> Since womanist theology is about empowerment, liberation, and inclusion, the writer recommends Foster Boyd model to the entire community of faith to include men as well.

On any given Sunday, the pastor/writer looks out at a body of wounded believers who wait to hear a word from God. The writer's womanist theological perspective emerges out of her determination to embrace her strength in pastoral care and a coaching style of leadership as she refuses to be a victim of cultural oppression and patriarchal dominance. While two-thirds of her congregation consist of women, on any given Sunday one will find the women of Webb Grove teaching Sunday School, leading as the Sunday School Superintendent, cooking the morning breakfast or preparing the Lord's table for communion.

All in all, Karen Baker-Fletcher defines womanist theology as social and relational.<sup>185</sup> The relationship between the writer's search for common ground theologically and the truth in returning to the radical work of the Trinity.

As a post womanist scholar, the writer's life has been deeply influenced by Vashti McKenzie, who served as her Episcopal leader for eight years. It is important to note that

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<sup>183</sup>Ibid.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid.

<sup>185</sup>Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing With God: The Trinity From A Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), ix.

the womanist approach provides her with an understanding of how God's communal nature is a holistic approach to healing and wholeness.

### **Moving from Hurt to Healing**

According to Anthony B. Robbins in the book, *What's Theology Got To Do With It: Convictions, Vitality, And The Church*, theology has plenty to do with congregation health.<sup>186</sup> Robinson reminds the reader that the current literature review of healthy congregations revealed a heavy reliance on the work of system's theory that was inspired by Murray Bowen and Edwin Friedman to include Peter Steinke insight on family systems approaches to congregations.<sup>187</sup> Robinson challenges the readers by asking the question, what has happened to theology? He suggest like the pop song, some have been "Looking for Love in all the Wrong Places" and adds, we in the church sometimes seem to look for life and health in the wrong places.<sup>188</sup> For this reason, Robinson contends, too many congregations are stuck, dysfunctional, toxic, or simply boring; in a word, unhealthy. He argues health is not merely the absence of conflict. Robinson advises conflict can be a sign of a healthy congregation. Peter Bellini stated in a lecture at the January 2012 Doctor of Ministry Intensive that revitalization of the church originates from and is rooted in the Triune God; it takes place where people in specific historical, cultural, social and spiritual context experience God's enlivening and reawakening Spirit

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<sup>186</sup>Anthony B. Robinson, *What's Theology Got To Do With It: Convictions, Vitality, And The Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), 7.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid.

leading to a fresh encounter with the living Christ.<sup>189</sup> He continues by saying, this gives rise to repentance, new life, spiritual revival, healing, reconciliation, love, hope, and holistic salvation.

Occasionally, the writer will look out in the congregation and see the mother of a young twenty-four year victim of a homicide or a young man who is struggling with an addiction. Andrew Sung Park, offers a remedy for victims who struggle with ongoing oppression. In his book, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded*, notes that healing is an ongoing process, transpiring gradually under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.<sup>190</sup> Parks articulates, justice will bring forth peace and sacred contentment to the sinned against and naturally lead to healing. Healing means to make whole or sound in bodily condition, to restore to health or soundness, to free from disease or ailment.

Henri Nouwen in his book *The Wounded Healer* articulates how the wounded can use their hurt and imperfection as an avenue of grace in working for the healing of others.<sup>191</sup> The writer describes herself as a wounded healer called to Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal to restore hope to a hurting and broken community.

The theological starting point to understanding a covenant community is the Trinity. In the book, *Joining the Dance: A Theology of the Spirit* to speak of God as

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<sup>189</sup>Peter Belini, 2012 Lecturer at the Doctoral of Ministry Intensive, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, Power Point Presentation Notes.

<sup>190</sup>Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 131.

<sup>191</sup>Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York, NY: Image Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1972), 83.

Trinity, Molly T. Marshall uses Jürgen Moltmann's idea of the open, inviting Trinity.<sup>192</sup>

Molly Marshall argues the mission Dei (God's universal mission) as narrated in the historical and prophetic books of the Hebrew Scriptures is to form a community to share in this mission.<sup>193</sup>

In the after-math of the Post-Liberation and Black Theology interval, Womanist Theology emerged to include all people. As a female pastor, nothing has come easy for her. The writer has survived because a determined attitude. Karen Baker-Fletcher offers an intriguing testimony as she says; in the book *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective*, womanist theology is integrative and relational.<sup>194</sup>

The premise of healing and wholeness in covenant community for the writer's project is best understood in the writings of Karen Baker-Fletcher, a Christian womanist theologian. While womanist theology does not divide or detach itself from liberation and Black theology, womanist theology draws on the interrelatedness of understanding God's healing presence, God as Trinity in the world. Fletcher Baker's Theology (*theos and logos*) simply means the study about God. In understanding the God of our healing and wholeness in the study of the Trinity from a womanist perspective, Karen Baker-Fletcher in the book, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* affirms Alice

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<sup>192</sup>Molly T. Marshall, *Joining the Dance: A Theology of the Spirit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 11.

<sup>193</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>194</sup>Karen Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity from a Womanist Perspective* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2006), ix.

Walker's observation that one *must struggle every minute of life to affirm Black people's right to a healthy existence*.<sup>195</sup>

Karen Baker-Fletcher advocates in the twelfth century, Anselm of Canterbury 1033-1109 CE defined theology as faith seeking understanding.<sup>196</sup> The task of theology is to seek understanding of God in our time in response to the existential questions raised in our present historical moment.<sup>197</sup> The primary task of theology as faith seeking understanding for our time understands in response to the divine call to overcome hatred and violence.<sup>198</sup> As womanist theologians and liberation theologians have emphasized, faith seeking understanding integrates practice with theory to form the praxis of mature persons of faith. It is significant for everyday and ongoing life of the church, past, present and to come. Faith seeking understanding involves spiritual striving toward meaning and wholeness in historical existence, in which the world everywhere and simultaneously experiences events of tragedy and joy.<sup>199</sup> Theology as faith seeking understanding includes courage to ask questions about God.<sup>200</sup>

The writer's pastoral and personal experiences as an African American female shape the immediate context for the womanist theological perspective for the present context at Webb Grove AME Church. Womanist theology is rooted in the suffering of the current social disparities with all people; male and female. Stephanie Mitchem's book

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<sup>195</sup>Baker-Fletcher, *Dancing with God: The Trinity*...20.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid

<sup>199</sup>Ibid.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid.

*Introducing Womanist Theology*, describes the unique experiences of African American women as she explores not only what theology is, but also how it is constructed.

Mitchem's book considers major components of womanist theology while showing the close connection of community in the life and experiences and Black women.<sup>201</sup>

Mitchem proposes that womanist theology starts with analysis of roles assigned to African American women in their families and the dominant culture, the persistent stereotypes about Black women, the combination of race with gender, and recognition of diversity among women.<sup>202</sup> Mitchem considers further similarities in the womanist perspective as she expresses personal truth in stating, for Black women to do this analysis of herself is, in itself, empowering as we discover truth about ourselves.<sup>203</sup> African American women often express their commitment to the entire community by working for the health of all members. In their actions, the race-gender-class interconnections are made visible.<sup>204</sup> On March 5, 2012, the writer attended a lecture on *Why Not Women: Women in Leadership in the Church and Society*. Dr. Forest Harris, President of the American Baptist College told the audience that the church is a human social institution of people with human needs.<sup>205</sup> To speak of the church as a human social institution is to agree with Marcia Y. Riggs who is equally concerned about the distorted relationship

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<sup>201</sup>Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Introducing Womanist Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 22.

<sup>202</sup>Ibid.

<sup>203</sup>Ibid.

<sup>204</sup>Ibid.

<sup>205</sup>Forest Harris, President at American Baptist College, Nashville, TN Lecture, *Why Not Women*, March 5, 2012.

between the biblical, historical, theological and ethical beliefs and moral practices with respect to gender equality in the church.

Riggs conveys that the church is a community (a body of persons who share some measure of common life, and a common loyalty) that fulfills the following functions: (1) a natural community, it addresses physical and social needs of humans beings; (2) a political community, it establishes an order to execute its purpose; (3) a community of language, its members communicate using a common language that distinguishes them from those outside the community; (4) a community of interpretations, it provides specific meanings of key terms and symbols that constitutes the distinctive beliefs and the identity of the community; (5) a community of memory and understanding it retains its identity over time because its members share a common memory of important events that are retold and relived; and (6) a community of belief and action its members share a commitment and a professed loyalty that is expressed through actions.<sup>206</sup>

This analysis according to Riggs explicates the way that African American church in its function as a supportive institution in the United States society tends to reinforce (mostly unintentionally) rather than challenge the racist, patriarchal capitalist social morality that supports sexual-gender oppression, and how being a human community of sexual-gender beings impacts the African American church's self-understanding and practices within its own walls and in society.<sup>207</sup> The unique struggles of the writer's spiritual journey have helped to shape who she has become for present usefulness in the context where she has served as the servant leader for the past five years. If the church

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<sup>206</sup>Marcia Y. Riggs, *Plenty Good Room: Women Verses Male Power in the Church* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press), 20.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid.

reclaims the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ, a healthier and holistic congregation can materialize. The Great Commission is a fulfillment of relationships. In practical theology, worship is a reflection of relationships. Worship is not an exercise. When this realization occurs, the people will worship with greater intensity, sincerity, and consistency. Worship is spiritual warfare. “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them” (Ex 25:8).

If there was ever a time in the history of the church when the Body of Christ needs to return to her first love, it is now. God’s desire is for the church to be a glorious bride in the forthcoming wedding of the church with her bridegroom, Jesus Christ. Yet today, the church is characterized by hardheartedness, halfhearted commitment, unfriendliness, and even immorality among its members and leaders in the church, both clergy and laity. For far too long the church has forgotten that God is holy. Yet even now, God is calling the church back to a relationship with God and to return to repentance and united prayer. To that end, God must be the object of worship.

On the one hand, if transformation for all is to occur, the church must return to God’s primary agenda of revival, and evangelism, and reclaiming the mission of making disciples. The church cannot afford to go on with business as usual. When the passion returns in the ministry, then the priorities of the church return. Today, the church faces an urgent need to return to God’s people to discipleship that is empowering and transformational. Indeed, can there be any real discipleship that does not include an intense focus on repentance and prayer. One of the tragic signs of modern times is the Church’s departure from periods of repentance as seen in the third and fourth century. There is no doubt that America has experienced a major shift in moral and spiritual

decline. Church membership has become a shallow and empty ritual. Members sign membership cards, put their names on church rolls, however, they never manifest any sign of repentance, nor do they join in a relationship with Jesus Christ and extend their relationship outwardly.

Today it seems many want to sit and be served, but few want to get up and serve. Rather, to reclaim the mission of making discipleships with a heart for worship an individual's attitude should not be *what can the church do for me*, but rather, *what can we do for the church*. What happens to love after the wedding? In this project the writer addresses what happens after two congregations came together to form one church. What happened to the love? The desire to research this project from within the author's call into ministry, living with years of oppression as a survivor of domestic violence, a widow, divorcee, wife, mother and female pastor of a congregation is influenced by mentors, various female trailblazers in ministry, womanist theologians, such as Emilie Townes, Monica Coleman, Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, Vashti McKenzie, Marcia Riggs, Stephanie Mitchem, and other theologians who contribute to the biblical, historical and theological foundations on promoting wholeness and congregational health. It is apparent that out of the writer's experiences and her ministry context, God has given her the strength to rise above tragedy. Sheron C. Patterson in the book, *New Faith: A Black Christian Woman's Guide to Reformation, Re-Creation, Rediscovery, Renaissance, Resurrection and Revival*, says, a support system for rethinking is Womanist Theology.

Theology is thoughts about who, what, why and how God is. Womanist theology gives life to the vision of empowered-sisters.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>208</sup>Sheron C. Patterson, *New Faith: A Black Christian Woman's Guide to Reformation, Re-Creation, Rediscovery, Renaissance, Resurrection, and Revival* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 26.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

#### Hypothesis

Chapter four discusses the methodology and the design of the model used in the field experience. The hypothesis for this project is if the church reclaims the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ a healthier and holistic congregation can materialize. The hypothesis of this project is subjective from a participant/observer perspective. Hypothesis is a tentative disprovable adapting working model of the functioning of a congregation as an interconnected web of relationships.<sup>1</sup> Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church, a merged congregation, located in Murfreesboro, Tennessee is the ministry context for this project entitled, *The Two Shall Become One: A Womanist Model of Healing and Wholeness in the Life of Merged Congregations*.

In 2010, the writer began her Doctoral Ministries Studies Degree program and detected after seventeen years of being together as a result of a congregational merger and relocation that God was not the object of the congregation's worship but they were more in love with their building, fundraising events and programs. Most of the members were concerned with *works* rather than *worship*. Gone are the days when brick, mortar, methods, and programs are more important than building relationships. Making disciples

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<sup>1</sup>David R. Sawyer, *Hope in Conflict: Discovering Wisdom in Congregational Turmoil* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2007), 95.

of Jesus Christ aligns itself with the biblical mandate to extend evangelism and discipleship to include congregational care to each other.

Church mergers have become a growing phenomenon due to congregations who have plateaued or declined in membership. Many churches are either on life support or just barely thriving. Two congregations with like-minded vision, purpose, and mission can have a greater impact when they come together as one church to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The results can be the synergy of a loving and healthy Christian community of faith.

### **Description of Ministry Model**

This *ethnographic study* explores the process of leading the congregation in a cultural study to reclaim its mission, passion, spiritual vitality, and a strategic heart for worship through discipleship and evangelism programs. The exploration to merge two fledgling congregations was led by the former pastor and the laity of the church.

The congregational merger and relocation involved two declining congregations. Webb Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church and Cedar Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church merged forming a new church called Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church. Webb Grove is a congregation with a rich history of two hundred and eighty two years. After the congregational merger and relocation, the church suffered from what the writer calls *church fatigue*, loss of memory and identity.

An ethnographic study used in this qualitative phenomenon is the examination and interpretation of observation for the purpose of discovering underlying meanings and

patterns of relationships.<sup>2</sup> Ethnography is a strategy of inquiry in which the writer studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting, primarily, observational and interview data.<sup>3</sup> Ethnography, the primary method of anthropology, is the earliest distinct tradition of qualitative inquiry.<sup>4</sup> The notion of culture is central to ethnography.<sup>5</sup> It is also a way of immersing oneself in the life of a people in order to learn something about and from them.<sup>6</sup> Ethos is the Greek word for people or cultural group. The study of ethos, then, or ethnography is devoted to describing ways of life of humankind.<sup>7</sup> Using the lens of a womanist perspective, the focus will be on developing a heart for worship and transformational leadership for all, which is essential for spiritual revitalization, spiritual wellness and renewal to reclaim and strengthen God's church.

The methodology used for this project was the qualitative approach. It was not limited to an ethnographic study. Instead a four-part sermon series, a four-week Bible study, surveys, a Webb Grove Choir questionnaire, an oral history project which is truth telling stories about their church history, focus groups, and a quarterly newsletter were used to help the congregation find the true meaning of community. The four-week Bible study series was used to reinforce the sermon series.

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<sup>2</sup>Handout from Core Class Instructor, Dr. Jackie R. Batson, D.Min. notes on Quantitative and Qualitative Research, August, 2011 Intensive (Dayton, Ohio: United Theological Seminary).

<sup>3</sup>John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2009), 13.

<sup>4</sup>Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 81.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

The Bible studies provided participants an opportunity to ask questions and interactively process what they have learned. Linking the sacred text of the past with the congregation's stories of the past to which they are as a church today was designed to cause the members to fall in love all over again. The four-part sermon series on the Ten Commandments and covenants were designed to develop a heart for worship, evangelism, and discipleship.

This approach involved the use of pre and posttest questionnaires and surveys. An ethnographic study of the congregation followed by a covenant agreement and a congregational wellness pledge were used to provide a strategic heart for worship, accountability, support, and encouragement to grow in faith. The covenant and the congregational pledge were used to provide a framework for transformational leadership for a balanced spiritual life, enabling each member to become disciples of Jesus Christ in a spirit of Christian love.

In selecting the qualitative approach, the writer became the participant-observer, which positioned the writer to collaborate with participants. The congregational Health Ministry Survey has four purposes: (1) identify the health needs and interest of members; (2) introduce new ideas about health, wholeness and spirituality; (3) discern the church's present need for a health ministry, and (4) discover resources for any additional healthy ministry actions that need to be considered for the ongoing success of this ministry project.

Once the intervention had been completed, the participants were observed for a change in their attitudes towards worship, acts of compassion, devotion, and how the congregations works together as a loving family. The writer as participant/observer

helped the congregation have a purposeful and meaningful conversation about shared values, visions, and mission as a merged congregation.

For the purpose of this project, the participant/observer's intent was to revitalize a disconnected community, rekindle the congregation's love relationship for God, self, and others who share with them in the household of faith, called Webb Grove AME Church. A case study of Webb Grove was based largely upon ethnographic data collected by the participant/observer. Participant observation is the methodology for ethnography.

The collection of this data will be used to assist the congregation understand their relationship with God, self and others for current and future needs as they seek to become a healthy and holistic Christianity community. This is an important and necessary phase in the life of the congregation. The writer participated in the spiritual well-being and wholeness process that led to participants holding each other spiritually accountable for the purpose of recovering spiritual vitality within the life of the congregation by fulfilling the Great Commission.

### **Research Design**

Chapter four provides the reader with a clear understanding of the importance of being a covenant community in response to God's redemptive love, the Great Commission, and the fulfillment of God's desire for healing and wholeness within the congregational life of the church and community.

The expected outcome of this project was to employ a ministry model based on covenant discipleship that will address the wounds of hurting people. The writer worked to foster the power of belonging in community, and practice the intentionality of caring

for one another. This process works to keep individuals connected, rooted, and grounded. Making disciples of Jesus Christ and evangelism is an ongoing process.

### **Pre-Test, Post-Test**

The writer implemented a series of pre and post-test questionnaires and surveys on Worship, a Relationship Communication Test, and Your Relationship Lifestyle Is about Relationships, which is included in the Appendix Section of the project.

In a qualitative research process, the writer discussed the scope of the design, the strengths of the design and how the project was organized to become an instrument of empowerment and transformation in reclaiming the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

The writer as participant/observer identified at the onset of this project the need to engage as many members of the church as possible in a series of fellowship gatherings, family church meals, surveys, questionnaires and holy conversations about the congregation's future growth and spiritual development. The writer allowed the participants to have monthly forums without her being present. This gave the members opportunities to participate in truth telling stories about the churches' histories and various strategic church growth plans to promote spirituality for leadership transformation and empowerment. Keeping in mind that at one time, this was a church very much rooted and connected in love and unity.

Additionally, a Homecoming Reunion took place, where members gathered memorabilia and shared stories from the past with other members of the church while working on building community in a new life together. The writer appointed an

individual to serve as the ministry team leader for the monthly focus group forums. The sessions were presented in an open and honest conversational method of dialogue for the collective interest of building a universal ground for worship.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

#### **Collection of Data**

In this chapter the writer will present the reader with a view of what happened during the actual implementation of the project. At the launch of this project, the writer utilized a demographic and ethnographic lifestyle study with a detailed report designed especially for Webb Grove about the demographics of where the congregation's church is located, faith preferences, faces of diversity, and community issues. This report was used as part of the pre-test survey to study the overall general church programs, lifestyles and related spiritual development programs based on the national averages for churches in the 37129 zip code area.

The data collected was structured in a natural setting at Webb Grove from surveys, questionnaires, stories, focus groups forums, open conversations, and one on one interviews. A Bible study and sermon series were used to influence unity, provide pastoral care and transformational leadership from a womanist perspective. An oral history project provided an opportunity for the congregation to tell the story of their church's history. The data gathered in this project is from the writer's ministry context.

Shortly after the writer arrived as the new pastor in October of 2008, she realized the congregation was dysfunctional and unhealthy. The members were unhappy about the congregational merger, relocation, and new edifice. Drawing on the writer's ability to

spiritually discern and listen objectively to these issues, the writer determined after several Doctor in Ministry peer group sessions that intervention was needed. In January 2011, the pastor and members of the congregation collaborated to start the *Let's Get Our Move on Healthy Church Initiative*.

The challenge for the writer was creating a ministry team based on the strengths and weaknesses of the merged congregation's ability to work together to cultivate a spiritually healthy and unified church. The writer designed questionnaires to stimulate reflections on building a healthy, holistic, and spiritually empowered ministry team, and changing attitudes so that a systemic change can occur. The results from these questions are included in the reflection, summary, and concluding experiences of this project.

The writer immediately began to observe the participants in the ministry context to identify individuals who had a willing spirit and heart to serve on a ministry worship team. As observation took place, the writer was made aware that members pretended to be one big happy family. The writer used her survival skills as a praying, strong black woman, mother, grandmother, and pastor to provide pastoral care and spiritual support to those in attendance.

### **Cultural Study of Webb Grove AME Church**

Webb Grove is a one hundred and seven-member church and growing. The merged congregation has been unfaithful to their merger covenant since the 1993 congregational merger, relocation, and the building of their new sanctuary. The writer's decision to move forward with her pastoral assignment as the new pastor came after her second year. Prior to the Doctor of Ministry project, the writer looked at the congregation

as a small struggling church. She knew she had to raise the consciousness of the people. Hence, in 2010 she changed the church's mission statement, celebrated the outgoing pastor and moved forward. After that she presented her mission/vision for the church: *A Campaign for Change where we are equipping and empowering a body of believers to impact the world at (THE WEBB).*

Becoming one church was a clear-cut assignment for the writer. In a strategic approach to ministry, she believed a team ministry would lead to an authentic worshipping community. Critical to establishing common ground for worship is the implementation of a strategic worship planning process. As a result of planning a ministry worship team, the team developed a covenant with one another. Establishing covenant relationships reminded Webb Grove of God's faithfulness when they initially decided to merge as one church, relocate and build a new sanctuary. The data from the surveys, questionnaires, and practical activities on a scale of one to ten, the people answered five. The first phase of the process began with communication. This was achieved with monthly focus group forums and commitments from individuals who had a passion for worship and a desire to serve.

Next, the Pastor learned that small group ministries were most effective due to the class leader system developed by John Wesley. John Wesley's class leader system was a practical means of discipleship and care for the soul; it equipped and empowered people for ministry. John Wesley, founder of Methodism, intentionally organized people into small groups for the study of Scripture, prayer, and to watch over one another in love. Wesley met in societies, classes and bands to encourage one another in small group covenant ministry settings. Wesley's spiritual practices fostered accountability to one

another in love. It demonstrated spiritual growth in community can be a successful resolution to bring healing and wholeness to become disciples of Jesus Christ.

Several ministry teams developed out of both a need to support the pastor in a special ministry assignment given to her by Bishop Vashti McKenzie to help St. Paul AME Church, a small declining rural church in Wartrace, Tennessee. The participants organized a worship team as part of the strategic planning process to bring healing and wholeness by employing practical activities that will lead to accomplish a goal.

Transformation within the local congregation began when volunteers from the local church agreed to travel with the on a special ministry mission each 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday's to assist a small rural, declining congregation located in Wartrace Tennessee. The church only had one member. It was Webb Grove's responsibility to provide hope, support and encouragement to this congregation. The worship team organized themselves as the Wartrace Warriors and the pastor organized the Praise in Motion Liturgical Dance Ministry for youth and youth adults between the ages of eight to twenty-four. Also the Minister of Music and the Webb Grove AME Church Choir Music Ministry came on board. The Wartrace Warrior's outreach ministry team was an integral part of the strategic planning process to create a strategic heart for worship, evangelism and discipleship.

The ethnographic cultural study was designed because there was some internal congregational tension that prevented the congregation from bonding as a family. The dysfunctional merged congregation experienced a tangled web of distrust, denial, and deception. Before the writer and members of Webb Grove launched this project with the one hundred seven-member congregation, the writer wrestled with the question of how

can the congregation move forward and recapture the project's initiative that is articulated in the hypothesis.

When the church merged in 1993 a new name was assigned to the church. Trying to make sense of Webb Grove AME church's new name, the writer discovered according to Webster's dictionary that a spider web is an intricate structure suggestive of something woven, a network, or a snare or entanglement. Next, she found out that a spider web can be a beautiful interwoven tapestry of glistening fibers, but it can also be a tangled mess in which something gets irreversibly stuck. Equally important, the writer learned a web can get very complex, tangled and knotted.

It is interesting to note that the writer's assignment at Webb Grove is to bring healing and wholeness to the congregation. The Web concept is significant because *the Web* symbolizes the interconnectedness of the world. Prior to this project, the participant/observer created a logo design for T-shirts that said, *Get Caught Up in the Webb*. The congregation benefited from this idea as it brought the members closer together. In fulfilling the purpose of this project it is also important to note there were several other questions that guided this cultural study. They are as follow:

- (1) Who are we?
- (2) What are we trying to accomplish?
- (3) Why are we in business?
- (4) What are the core common values, vision, mission and purpose of Webb Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church?
- (5) What changes occurred in the participants' behavior and attitudes toward worship as a result of the focus group conversations, sharing the history of the church, four-week Bible Study on discipleship, Sermon Series on worship, The Ten Commandments, and outreach ministries?

- (6) What was the overall effectiveness of the core group ministry context team that developed from the focus group conversations?
- (7) How might worship teams work together to hold one another accountable to the process of understanding and valuing worship individually and as a community?

This narrative method of research evolved after much discussion from the lay leadership of the church and the writer who is the participant observer in this project. At the beginning of the Annual Conference year in October 2011, the writer asked for the leaders of the church to share their ideas in coming up with a theme, vision, mission and core values for the conference year. It was suggested and agreed upon by all, our theme would be *Let's Get Our Move on Healthy Church Initiative*. It was at that time the writer cast her vision/mission for the church's' 2011-2012 annual calendar year. She knew that intervention was needed to become a unified loving and healthy congregation with a common ground to worship. The writer and leadership of the church agreed that areas of congregational change in were stewardship, discipleship, worship, intentional faith development, mission and purpose, and how to work together as a team.

The Official Board members which consisted of the pastor as the chair, stewards, trustees and organizational leaders of the local church's ministry context understood the mission/vision of the pastor and asked for permission from the pastor to have regular monthly focus group forums. These conversations were a part of the strategic planning process in getting the congregation to work together. It is through conversations that change happens. Gil Rendle and Alice Mann say that congregations need structured ways

to talk about their identity, purpose, and future, and they need a path to develop consensus and a commitment to act.<sup>1</sup>

On the first Sunday of January 2012, a Recommitment Service was held to allow members to renew their covenant and participate in The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper by intention. At the Wednesday Night Bible Study the participants were asked to talk about their experience as each person shared in the Cup of Intention. Most of the members said they had never done Communion in that manner before. Some felt as if we were breaking health rules and they might get sick from dipping into the same cup. Some were undecided so they did not come to the table and others left the church confused because the Cup of Intinction was not the norm for them. They were accustomed to receiving wafers and individual cups.

A pastoral evaluation was distributed to the members during the 11:00 Sunday morning worship service. The data collected from the evaluation suggests the pastor's leadership style is that of a micro-manager. The writer felt she needed to be present to control and make sure everything was done to her satisfaction. However, after the initial focus group forum, members of the church began to express a sense of freedom and willingness to serve and begin to respond in a positive manner to changes being made in the church. The building, budgets, and programs were losing their priority to worshipping God in Spirit and truth.

This project was evidence that intervention was needed. The data collected in this project focused on transformational leadership that will ultimately affect the entire congregation's future. The writer recognized early in the project that the key to the

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<sup>1</sup>Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations* (The Alban Institute, 2003), xv.

congregations' spiritual growth and development was when they work together as a team and share in congregational leadership decisions and strategic planning that affects the overall church.

At the Spirituality and Wellness Seminar, the writer gave a health and healing quiz. It was a self-evaluation that measured their health and wellness in seven areas:

- Happiness emotional
- Enlightenment spiritual
- Attitude moral
- Love relational
- Thoughts mental
- Health physical
- Or all of the above

There were at least ten persons that attended and participated in the biggest/loser weekly health and wellness ministry each week. At the Spirituality and Wellness Seminar approximately forty people attended. The survey asked three questions, (1) what impact has the Chair Dancing Health and Wellness Ministry had on your worship relationship with God, self and others; (2) How has the Chair Dancing Ministry impacted your witness in evangelism; (3) What impact has the Chair Dancing Ministry had on your overall Wellness of your lifestyle? Not everyone participated in the survey. Only twenty persons returned their surveys. Given the positive responses to the survey, the data suggest people are concerned about the total care for their mind body and spirit. In a one-on-one interview, one participant stated after several weeks of attending the Chair Dancing Health Ministry, she could stand longer and had better movability in her legs.

Thirty-five Adults participated in pre and post-test surveys on relationship building, the relationship communication test and a choir questionnaire on ways the choir could grow spiritually. The writer and the Minister of Music worked together to transform the 11:00 A. M. worship hour from entertainment to an intimate time of worship. Of those thirty-five participants, ten of them were youth and young adults between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-even questions. The questions coded with the most responses as: *Do you and your partners have serious talk?* Twenty-five persons responded (Yes) of the thirty-five participants. The writer asked, *do you hold each other accountable spiritually.* Twenty participants responded (No) of the thirty-five participants responding. When asked, *do you read the bible daily?* Twenty of the thirty-five responded (NO). The other fifteen participants responded (Yes). In the Relationship Test the participants were asked, *do you do things to enhance your spiritual life?* Thirty-five participants responded. Of those thirty-five, twenty-five participants responded (Yes) and only ten responded (No). The writer believes the lack of spending time reading the Bible and the lack of personal devotion affects an individual's relationship with others. All of the surveys and questionnaires can be found in the Appendix of the project.

### **Bible Study, Sermon Series on Covenant Discipleship And Jesus and Me Fellowship**

The Covenant Discipleship Bible Study group is a small fellowship of five to ten persons who meet for about an hour each week. They hold each other mutually accountable. The Bible study and Sermon series ran concurrently with a teaching and

preaching series on the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20: 1-7. The theme for the study and sermon series was entitled: When Worship is For Real and Slip Slide and Cheating on the Side. The Bible Study and preaching series addressed what it means to be a covenant community, congregational health, and idolatry. The goal of the four-week Bible Study was to teach the biblical foundations of a healthy community and discipleship. The Pastor did a Bible study on the eight principles of worship to provide a means for each member in the group and members of the church to renew their covenant commitment.

A covenant was distributed to twenty-five members of the church. Some were Bible study students, Sunday school teachers, choir members, and youth leaders. Everyone signed the covenants pledging to practice daily devotions, scripture reading, prayer, and be faithful in their worship and stewardship.

Just as the church needed intervention, the writer also needs healing and wholeness. A Broad Based Survey was distributed to the members of the church to evaluate the writer in the areas of (1) Public worship ministry; (2) Pastoral Ministry; (3) the pastor's greatest strengths and abilities, and (4) Pastoral Recommendations. The data suggested the pastor was a micro manager. The data also suggested she had great strengths, however she needed to strengthen her listening skills. The pastoral evaluation was adapted from *Evaluations Essential for Congregational Leaders: Setting the Table for Healthy Congregations*.

### **Analysis of the Data**

The collection of the pre-test data suggested that the congregation lack personal devotion time with God, some of the members lacked a sense of commitment and many desired to have a closer relationship with God. These themes helped to explain the behavioral problems, health issues, relapse with addiction issues, conflict, and the mental health issues that developed within the church. It was obvious that the church was sick unto death. In order to provide effective treatment to the members it was important to provide healthy and holistic treatment to resolve the issues that had festered with the church.

The writer conducted a qualitative data analysis throughout the pre and post-test phases of the process. She identified themes that emerged from the data. She looked for emerging themes and patterns in behavior of the congregation as a whole from the responses of the data as well. Several questions guided the research for this project. These questions were stated in chapter four of the methodology. The initial congregational ministry assessment denoted for the most part the members had issues with conflict resolution. The results and responses of the findings indicate spirituality and family worship time can be a therapeutic tool to help resolve anger, grief, loss, and mourning.

The attendance in Bible study and fellowship has grown tremendously since the project began in 2010. The Thursday night fellowship has increased to provide a family and extended family atmosphere. Many of the people who attend the church are from broken homes and rarely have the opportunity to sit down, eat together or study together as a family. The results of the data show rituals, such as the weekly fellowship time of sharing a meal together can provide healing and wholeness.

In a one-on-one interview with couples, the data results from the worship survey indicate couples are working through their trust issues in their relationship with each other. In analyzing the data from the Relationship Lifestyle and Spirituality and Wellness Tests, the data suggest individuals appreciate the difference in each other. One of the key benefits of small group Bible study groups or small group ministry teams is the significance of bonding and becoming a spiritual family to one another. The small group ministry dynamics develop commitments and covenants with each other that ultimately lead to discipleship.

Also a quarterly newsletter was started, called The *WEBB*. Several outreach ministries such as Jesus and Me (JAM) Youth Leadership Fellowship meeting, Feet on the Street Outreach Ministry, The Wartrace Warriors Outreach Team, and the Chair Dancing Health and Wellness Ministry contributed to the success of the focus group forums. The Wednesday night Bible study was moved to Thursday night so all the core group ministry in-reach and outreach teams could interact with each other. By moving the weekly meetings to Thursday nights the members thought the change would reduce the monthly expenses on the use of electricity. While expense may have been reduced, the change brought the entire church closer. Two ministries were initiated: a weekly distribution of food and non-perishable items are disseminated to the community and a meal is prepared each week at the Thursday night youth and adult Bible study.

As a result of the monthly focus group conversations, levels of commitment, stewardship and passion for worship has changed the attitudes of the members. Two young men have accepted their call to preach; individuals who have never participated in

leading worship, Bible study sessions for adults and youth are becoming leaders in the church.

The highlight of the project is a seasoned ninety-year old woman (Deaconess Holt) assumed the leadership responsibility of the Chair Dancing Health and Wellness Ministry. Sister Holt felt like she was not accepted as a member of Webb Grove because she came from another AME Church. She always reminded the pastor “*I feel like an outsider even after being here twenty years.*” Given these facts, the elderly deaconess will be leading the Chair Dancing Health and Wellness Ministry. The Health and Wellness Ministry involved members from the church and community. It allowed members to become accountable along with being aware of taking care of their mind, body, and spirit. New people joined the health and wellness ministry and Heritage Medical Center partnered with our church to host a Spirituality and Wellness Seminar. The desired result was to observe a change in how the members treated each other and a change in their overall stewardship: time, talents and treasures. These changes would be most visible in their spiritual development and discipleship. The goal of the Choir’s worship survey was to cultivate awareness for passionate worship and to increase their understanding about worship. The data from the from the worship survey suggest the choir still has a lot of growing to do in the areas of leadership, daily devotional time with God and practicing worship to the point where the people feel comfortable lifting their hands and there is a consistency in expressing their love for God.

In order to confirm of the writer’s data and increase the validity of the process, the writer triangulated the data through multiple sources and perspectives. Data triangulation

involves the use of different sources of data/information.<sup>2</sup> Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researches to check and establish validity of the findings.<sup>3</sup> Using triangulation or three or more forms of data collection enables the writer to examine the phenomenon from different perspectives. Triangulation of the data drawn from all of the surveys, questionnaires, and the Congregational Healthy Ministry Questionnaire can be used to confirm that a healthy church is a church that works together to equip and empower a body of believers to impact the world. It's only in community that people learn how to serve and reclaim the mission of Jesus Christ. The transformation that occurred in the lives of the members of the congregation during the course of this project made a tremendous impact on the overall energy, excitement and enthusiasm to praise and worship God.

### **Outcomes**

What lies ahead? A new model of a spiritual formation group to explore spirituality together in community as individuals form mentoring study groups and covenant friendships to clarify their common values, mission and purpose that can be adaptable for future congregations and for developing new faith communities. Reconnecting with the mission of the church was not easy. However, the pastor trusted the process as she has been told on many occasions throughout the development of this doctoral project. As Webb Grove looks to the future, it will reinforce the principles and passions of John Wesley, Richard Allen and Jarena Lee's' spirit of evangelism and discipleship. Today, spiritual disciplines still work. Wesley's class leader system of

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<sup>2</sup>Handout from Dr. Jackie Baston, "Triangulation: Establishing the Validity of Qualitative Studies" (United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio, 2010).

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

mutual accountability is effective to nurture covenant discipleship groups to connect with God, self and others. Reclaiming the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ has been a challenge, but necessary in order to restore spiritual health and vitality into the life of the church. The outcome is for the congregation is to be a unified community of believers with a heart for worship. The desired outcome also is for the church to reaffirm its mission of rediscovering the passion to be a transformational leader for the 21<sup>st</sup> century from a womanist perspective.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION**

Chapter six is a reflection, summary, and conclusion of the congregational cultural study and of the writer's personal experience and evaluation of this project. The design of this project was developed to renew the love that once existed in a merged congregation. The Doctor of Ministry Degree at United Theological Seminary is the culmination of a life-long ministry goal.

In August 2010, when this transformational journey began, the writer never dreamed her time at United Theological Seminary would be a defining moment in her spiritual journey. The writer knew who she was, at least she thought she did, until she started writing and telling her story. She realized that her story is a powerful part of her human existence. When asked by her mentors, Dr. Donnell Moore and Dr. Angela Washington, can you tell us who you are? The writer dreaded having to revisit her painful past in the presence of people she had only met perhaps on two occasions. This was a difficult request, yet she trusted the process, and it has changed her life. As the writer shared her story, the peer associates provided her with sisterly and brotherly support as she discovered her spiritual journey had been marked by God moments. All of the struggles she encountered along the way were life lessons that prepared her for such a time as this.

It all began with writing a Spiritual Autobiography. This process was an opportunity to uncover several layers of distrust, death, discouragement and defeat within the life of the church as well as in the life of the writer of this project. The writer discovered writing the Spiritual Autobiography is both a means of grace and a divine path to healing and wholeness. It was not until the writer learned to take control of her own life and find true identity in Christ that she became liberated and empowered.

After writing the spiritual autobiography, the contextual analysis and the synergy, the writer was asked to identify the problem with the ministry context. Several themes emerged about the context and about the writer's life. There were times when the writer became angry, frustrated, happy and sad and wanted to quit, however, her peer associates and focus group mentors, Dr. Donnell Moore, Jr. and Dr. Angela Washington, kept the writer encouraged. However, the writer shares the transparency of her painful journey that others in the body of Christ might be healed. She realizes that God created us for interdependence and not independence. Relationships are necessary.

The writer recognizes the key to congregational health and spirituality vitality is connected to living in covenant communities with one another. All of her pastoral ministry the writer has served small congregations with a membership role of five to one hundred and twenty-five members. The writer of this project discovered small group ministries can evolve into Christ-centered ministries when people bond together as a church family regularly for study, prayer, sharing, and focus on mutual care and accountability. This is inclusive of sharing the burdens of each other to equip and empower a body of believers to impact the world.

As the writer reflects on her pastoral ministry, she draws from the conclusion of her ministry context at Webb Grove AME church. The church has afforded her an opportunity to observe behavior patterns, themes, and human systems that are helpful to understanding the dynamics of how people live together as a church family which is very similar to our biological families.

In reflecting on insights about the things the researcher could have done in the project, the researcher believes each person in the covenant discipleship ministry groups should have been instructed or advised to keep a spiritual journal to log her/his spiritual journey with God. Journaling one's spiritual journey would enable the individuals to reflect upon the God moments in her/his life. The spiritual journal would include prayers, favorite scriptures, quotes, conversations with God, celebrations, and critical events that help to integrate the meaning and purpose of where God is leading the individual through these events. In looking back at the development of this project, the writer realized that she could have done a genogram study on the various family systems in the church. However, for the sake of time did not pursue this process.

Thinking about her new pastoral perspective of understanding the missional ecclesiology of the church, the writer re-examines the Christian message of discipleship found in Matthew 28:19-20. Reflecting on the First Corinthians 12 passage, the writer is reminded of the diversity of gifts that exist in the Kingdom of God.

From the writer's early childhood she recalls having strong mentors who taught her the importance of spiritual disciplines beginning with her mother, who is 90 years old. The writer's mother, a woman of quiet strength has been a role model to pattern her life after as she raised her own children and the foster children she has parented as well.

Although her mother lives approximately 300 miles away, she has prayed her through this project every step of the way. Nevertheless, God has been preparing her through life's adversities to be a proto-type of healing and wholeness to redefine covenant relationships in her role as the pastor, leader and congregational care-giver from the early childhood beginnings of her desire to be a professional model.

This project has helped the writer develop her listening skills to a greater intensity. Carefully listening to the stories of the many congregations as a pastor taught the writer to value listening to the souls of individual's fears; people who are afraid to let go and give spiritual birth to find one's true identity and calling. Gathering stories from the congregation has also taught the writer to listen for the heart of the congregation to find deeper theological meanings to influence congregational health as well as individual spiritual growth. Acknowledging her call to preach was a major transition in her life. Focus group forums created an environment to process the congregation's frustrations, and served as grief therapy to heal past hurts. The writer was cognizant it might be a difficult journey getting the two congregations to admit they were disingenuous about their happy church merger.

In many churches, parishioners never take the time to fellowship and get to know each other. Throughout this project, were key words such as: renewal, restoration, revitalization, repentance, forgiveness, community, brokenness, love and merge that helps to lead to the successful implementation of this ministry model. While there is no need to reinvent the wheel, implementing evangelism and practical disciplines, devoting time to prayer and the teachings of Jesus are essential for church growth.

The writer had a decision to make; present life to the congregation or sit back and watch it die. Bible studies, sermons, focus groups, spirituality and wellness ministry breathed new wine into old wineskins. Replicating this model can happen for congregations that have plateaued or declining in membership. The project's model can be adapted to bring healing and wholeness to couples in their marriage relationships. Restoring spiritual health and vitality in life of the congregation was paramount for Webb Grove who lost sight of her mission. When congregations lose their way, they lose their spiritual effectiveness.

### **The Epilogue**

Where do I go from here? How can I continue this project from this point on? The church is an important place for those who think in terms of the church as a building, however, for those who see the church as a body; a living organism in all of its millions of living cells that work together in all of its awe. Without oxygen, blood, a healthy heart, water, nutrition, and physical exercise, the body would soon die. *Let's Get Our Move on Healthy Church Initiative* is more than a social concern. It is the beginning of a challenge to pastors and congregations to do more than talk about church growth in terms of becoming spiritually healthy. Just as the various systems of the human anatomy make up the human body, there are systems within the life of congregations. While health can better be understood if each person is seen as part of an interconnected, biological, social, and emotional system, *Let's Get Our Move On Healthy Church Initiative* can be useful to promote physical and spiritual wholeness in the congregational life of the church as clergy and laity work collectively to promote healthy church initiatives over programs,

budgets, and membership rallies for the purpose of increasing their numbers on church roles. Healthy congregations produce healthy communities and healthy relationships can go a long way to transform an unhealthy congregational membership into disciples of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the writer recommends learning experiences that could possibly lead to ministry developments or workshops on subjects such as: Becoming One Flesh, An Adopt-A Church Program, Creating Healthy Church Merger Workshops, Keeping the Covenant in a Marriage of Two or More Congregations, When Two Hearts Beat as One, Healthy Church Marriage Mergers, Clergy Couples Support Groups, Healthy Transitions in Church Mergers: Forgiveness is Healthy and Congregational Wellness Retreats, and Storytelling is Healing are all innovative workshop and learning opportunities to bring healing and wholeness to broken and wounded clergy and laity.

On July 16-20, 2012 the writer and her husband, who is a pastor also attended a Healthy Transitions Wellness Retreat for ministers and spouses sponsored by Ministering to Ministers Foundation and co-Sponsored by the Norton Institute for Congregational Health at Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tennessee. The retreat offered care to ministry caregivers, pastors, ministry leaders and their spouses throughout the United States offering the opportunity to renew and refresh the mind body and spirit. The five day wellness retreat began on Monday with the session entitled Ministering for Emotional Wellness. It begin with the various sessions on Telling your story, Increasing your self-awareness, Coping with your anger listening. Day two was Personal Wellness: Thinking in systems, Resolving Disputes, Leading by empowering. Day three: Physical wellness: Caring for your physical self, Maintaining Your Sense of Humor, Day four:

Professional wellness: Creating a Market for Your skills, Developing a Support Group, understanding the Cultural Shift, Preparing and enhancing interview skills, Day five: Spiritual wellness Devotions and Enriching Your spiritual Self.

The writer believes support groups are a necessary phase in the healing process in churches and community today as clergy and church leaders practice caring for self and one another. Support groups develop friendships provide a sense of belonging, a safe place to share one's story, and they can be affirming and help individuals confront their issues. Forgiveness is an opportunity to forgive your self first, let go of past pain, and move on in a time of transition in a church merger when trying to create a spiritually vitally healthy community. Clearly, a community divided cannot stand so let the healing begin.

At the conclusion of the Candidacy Review Team Evaluation the writer was asked two questions; as the project evolves, determine who you get to be so the congregation can see Jesus and what changes should you make to encourage change in them? The first year of the writer's pastoral appointment she was told by one of the parishioners she was a micro-manager. After writing her spiritual autobiography it was revealed to the writer, she had been in controlling relationships which caused her to have a controlling style of leadership and be a controlling person in making leadership decisions as the pastor. Knowing this controlling style of leadership was unacceptable if the writer was going to create change and transformation within the life of the congregation, she did a self-analysis and made adjustments along the way. Then she started coaching the people to improve the morale at the church. The writer empowered and equipped others to help her lead the congregation. This approach immediately created a different spirit within the

church. When the writer appointed individuals to lead meetings as in a peer group setting without her being present the members began to open up to talk freely. This method was a way of getting them to tell stories, share their feelings, observations and reactions. It worked. Conversations brought closeness and it presented opportunities for individuals to share their gifts and graces in ministry opportunities in the church. The outcome and results was a congregation working together to create a team. The outcome was a success. The writer served as their coach (pastor) by loving and encouraging them in leading the congregation to make decisions about the values, mission, and identity of the church. Her conversion experience occurred when she publically apologized and admitted to the congregation and the person who accused her of being a micro manager she needed to change her controlling style of leadership.

At first the writer discovered she was having temper tantrums, but after her conversion, she changed from a micro manager to a macro leader. Shared leadership styles far supersede a controlling style of leadership. Relationships matter, especially when the end result is to build a team of inclusion. Overall, the writer made adjustments along the way and she learned people respond differently to authority when they feel they have a sense of belonging. The change within the writer coincided with her transition from a controlling micro-manager to coach macro-manager. These changes redefined the importance of just loving the people, and caring about the interest of the congregation. Acquiescing to lead with compassion and courage has led to shape a new model of ministry at Webb Grove with a different mindset for effectiveness in reclaiming the mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ.

As the project evolved, the writer developed a passion and desire to pursue more training in pastoral care, clinical pastoral education, counseling and coaching. When the writer recognized her secret weapon was just love the people, empower the people, equip the people and deploy the people to do Kingdom work, things changed in her ministry context. One lesson in particular that is etched in her head and heart is: you don't have to bow and be one of the boys, play by their rules and be a victim of cultural oppression and patriarchal dominance. Finally, the writer distinguishes herself as one who is constantly evolving.

**APPENDIX A**  
**RELATIONSHIP COMMUNICATION TEST**

### Relationship Communication Test

Circle "True" for all of the statements that express at least occasional problems on your part.

- |  |            |
|--|------------|
| 1. I often can't seem to find the right words to express what I want to say.                           | True False |
| 2. I worry that exposing myself to my partner will result in rejection.                                | True False |
| 3. I often don't talk because I'm afraid my opinion is wrong.  | True False |
| 4. Speaking up will only make things worse.  | True False |
| 5. I talk too much and don't give my partner a chance to speak.  | True False |
| 6. I don't look forward to talking to my partner.  | True False |
| 7. Once I get started in an argument, I have trouble stopping.   | True False |
| 8. My speech is often defensive.   | True False |
| 9. I frequently bring up his or her past failures.   | True False |
| 10. My actions don't match what I say.   | True False |
| 11. I don't really listen.   | True False |
| 12. I try to repay anger with anger or insult with insult.   | True False |
| 13. I tease my mate too much.  | True False |
| 14. I talk about really important things too rarely.   | True False |
| 15. I often lie by omission.   | True False |
| 16. I hate it when my partner brings up a problem.   | True False |
| 17. I think it's important to lay out to my partner all of the complaints I have about him or her.     | True False |
| 18. I state my complaints in a heated manner.  | True False |
| 19. I tend to say, "You always" or "You never," when discussing my complaints with my partner.         | True False |
| 20. I rarely state my complaints to keep from hurting my spouse.                                       | True False |
| 21. I don't like to argue because I feel arguing reflects badly on the relationship.                   | True False |
| 22. I don't like to discuss our negative feelings because it only makes us feel worse.                 | True False |
| 23. I don't feel I should have to bring up what's bothering me because my partner should already know. |            |

Adapted from Dr. Phil's Relationship quiz

**APPENDIX B**  
**SPIRITUALITY AND WELLNESS**

Spirituality and Wellness  
IT TAKES TWO TO TANGO  
Wellness is a Choice  
HONOR OUR BODIES  
Seminar

Rev. Janie Dowdy-Dandridge, M Div. Instructor

April 24, 2012

Welcome/Occasion/Prayer Exercise and Meditation

Course:

The purpose of this course is to develop a

**Introduction:** In our world of over commitment, stress and deadlines, it's easy to come up with excuses why we cannot find the time to Honor Our Bodies. I believe it is very important to Honor Our Bodies. After all God created us in His image and in His likeness. The number one threats to African American women and men are obesity and stress

Obesity causes excessive stress on the body. The life expectance of women in the US is approaching 80 years old and more women are expected to turn sixty five in the second decade of the millennium of the new millennium. I want to encourage you to invest in yourself by investing in taking charge of your health, well and making sure you include taking time to meditate rest, relax and drink plenty of water and learn to enjoy life. The Bible is clear about our purpose and our fulfillment and it can only be realized as we participate in complete fellowship with Him. Let us never forget we are triune being, mind, body and spirit. In other words Just as our bodies have many parts each part has a special function. So it is with the body of Christ. The fellowship of Spirituality and Wellness connects us to a purpose that is greater than ourselves. It is God's desire for us to live in communion with Him...apart from Him we can do nothing. Nothing is more important than the relationship we have with God.

3 JOHN 1-2

Beloved, I wish above all things that you may prosper and be in health, even as your soul prospers. In the Christian tradition, Jesus promises: "I came that you would have life, and

have it in abundance" There is a direct relationship or link between faith or spirituality and health. God made us with a spirit, soul and body and they work together in a marvelous way. "...*Spend your time and energy in training yourself for spiritual fitness. Physical exercise has some value, but spiritual exercise is much more important for it promises a reward in both this life and the next. This is true and everyone should accept it.*" 1 Timothy 4:7-9 (New Living Translation – First Edition) "*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*" Ephesians 2:10

1. What is a working definition of Spirituality? In the Christian tradition it is a sacred journey that connects with your core values and beliefs about God.
2. Define Wellness....wellness is the process of becoming aware of making intentional choices that support your wellbeing. Wellness means taking responsibility to create a positive lifestyle that supports the fulfillment of your potential through a balanced lifestyle of eight key dimensions of life
  - a. Social, cultural, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, environmental and occupational
  - b. To live a long and prosperous life is to include prayer, meditation, a healthy diet, exercise, journaling, live, laugh, and love.
  - c. Can't is Not an Option
3. What's the payoff for adopting a lifestyle of spirituality and wellness?
4. Detox your Body
5. Obey Your Body
6. Prayer
7. Meditation
8. Time for Reflection
9. Power Walks...give me time to think
10. Power Drives
11. Relaxing Worship Music

**APPENDIX C**  
**THE HEALTH AND WELLNESS QUIZ**



**APPENDIX D**  
**LIFE COVENANT**

## A COVENANT FOR OUR LIFE TOGETHER\*

### WEBB GROVE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

As people reconciled to God by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe that we are called to live together, treat one another, and respond to conflict in ways that are remarkably different from the ways the world does the same. In all dealings with one another, our goal is to glorify God, allowing Scripture, especially Colossians 3:12-17 and I Thessalonians 5:12-26, to guide our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. To this end, at Webb Grove AME Church, we commit to a life together in which...

#### OUR POSTURE TOWARD ONE ANOTHER

*Phil. 2:3-4, Col. 3:12-17, James 1:2-4, 19, 1 Cor. 10:31-11:1, Luke 6:27-36, Gal. 5:19-26, Rom. 8:28-29, 1 Peter 3:10-17, John 13:34-35*

1. We maintain a posture of openness and humility toward one another, giving one another the benefit of the doubt, always seeking to build each other up and not tear down. To this end:

- We make positive investments in one another's lives.
- We seek to communicate clearly and completely, listening charitably and sharing honestly without assumption and gossip.

2. We honor and support the office of pastor and other lay leaders, always seeking to discover what is best for our church as a whole, not what may be best for any one individual or small group in the church.

#### HOW WE HANDLE CONFLICT

*Matt. 5:9, Matt. 6:12, Matt. 18:15-20, Matt. 25:14-21, Gal. 6:1, Col. 3:13, Eph. 4:1-6, 31-32, Rom. 12:18, 1 Peter 2:19, 1 Peter 4:19*

3. We accept conflict as normal and natural part of life in community. We understand conflict as an opportunity to grow in Christ and in healthy authentic relationships with one another. As a Christian Community we do not fear or ignore conflict, but with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we work through conflict toward resolution.

4. We are self-reflective, confessing our sin to those we wrong. We will actively and graciously pursue genuine peace and authentic reconciliation, carefully using mediators when appropriate. We will seek just and mutually beneficial solutions to our differences.

With God's grace, we will apply these principles as a matter of stewardship, realizing that conflict is an opportunity, not an accident. We will pray that our life together, the way in which we treat one another and handle conflict, will bring praise to our Lord and lead others to know God's infinite love.

\*Adapted from "The Peacemaker's Pledge," produced by Peacemaker Ministries.

**APPENDIX E**  
**WELL PLEDGE**

**CONGREGATIONAL WELL PLEDGE**  
**WEBB GROVE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

*April 21, 2012*

We, as people of faith, commit to pursuing a healthy way of life for ourselves, our families and the community of Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Our faith tradition challenges and inspires (*or requires*) us to care for our bodies as a sacred part of Creation, as a means to honor God's Creation, as a means to honor God and to be able to bring our unique gifts into a world that needs them. Holistic health is necessary to impact the Kingdom.

We acknowledge that our health is powerfully shaped by the places we live, work, learn, play and worship, making healthy eating plans and physical activity apart of our daily routine.

Our congregation agrees to commit to stewardship of our body, mind and spirit. A discipleship strategy will improve our spirituality as we seek to make healthy choices by participating in our Let's Get Our Move on Healthy Church Initiative, April 21, 2012. We believe in Spirituality and Wellness: It Takes Two to Tango.

**Our congregation agrees to:**

**Get Moving!** We will create/continue a Congregational Wellness Team, a Missional Evangelism Team to demonstrate other forms of leadership to guide how to balance spirituality and health.

**Share!** We will share our experience with other congregations and/or work to influence health in our neighborhoods, state, or wider world by creating healthy places.

\_\_\_\_\_ signed

\_\_\_\_\_ date

**APPENDIX F**  
**HOLY MANNERS**

## WEBB GROVE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

### Holy Manners

Embracing the concept that we have been born again into the kingdom of God in Christ, and that the Holy Spirit is transforming us to be like Christ...

Recognizing that the church is not our idea but God's idea, and that His Spirit wants to guide us,

We commit to the following ways of working together:

Because this is the Lord's work, we will be determined to pray, so that we are in step with Him.

Acts 2:42

We will speak the truth – in love – to one another. (Eph. 4:15)

We will each take responsibility for peace and unity, while also recognizing it is not our responsibility alone. (Rom 12:18; Eph 4:3)

We will go the extra mile to get through conflict to find understanding on the other side. (Eph 4:2; 1 Cor. 13: 5-7)

We will discipline ourselves to listen to one another actively, and to choose listening above getting angry. (James 1:19)

When we don't understand, we will ask for help to understand.

We can agree to disagree without rancor, recognizing that no one has a corner on truth and that there is always more we can learn. (Rom 12:3; Sixth Covenant Affirmation)

We will refuse to create factions within the congregation. (Eph.4:3; 1 Cor. 1:10)

Mindful of the plank in our own eye, we will not too quickly point out the splinters in others' (Matt 7:4).

Forgiveness is a mark of Christ among us; as forgiven people, we will choose to forgive one another. (Eph 4:32)

God gives us leaders as a gift; we will pray for them and extend to them honor and trust. (Heb. 13:7, 17-18)

\*Adapted from The Peacemaker's Pledge, produced by Peacemaker Ministries.

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